The Peril of Dionysio

Mary E. Mannix

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BY

MARY E. MANNIX

Author of "Cupa Revisited," "As True as Gold," etc.

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THE PERIL OF DIONYSIO

CHAPTER I

THE SEÑORA'S WEDDING-DRESS

WHEN Ramona Almirante's grandmother died, her aunts and cousins, who had never been friendly to the girl or her brother, because of their Indian blood, descended like an avalanche upon the homestead, and one of these, at least, had not the decency to wait till after the funeral to let her know that her presence was no longer desired in the home which had been hers since early childhood.[1]

Ramona had not always been aware of this admixture, but as soon as she discovered it, which was in a manner that brought her a brother whom she tenderly loved, her life had taken on a warmer and happier tone. Alejandro was four years younger than his sister; a fine boy, who hoped to

[1] Read "As True as Gold."

enter the novitiate at Santa Clara as soon as he had graduated there. Ramona also was contemplating a religious life, but of this her relatives knew nothing. They were of a coarser fiber than their mother, the Señora Almirante, who, though of an ardent and somewhat haughty nature, had passed through such fires of sorrow and experience as had softened and purified it. Living alone with her gentle, loving granddaughter for so many years, life had flowed on smoothly for both.

Though she would not have acknowledged it even to herself, the Señora Almirante felt that Ramona was nearer and dearer than those of her own children still remaining, all parted from her by change and circumstance.

Ramona's father had been her favorite child, and his daughter had inherited his gentle temperament, though her character was much stronger than his had been.

The Señora Almirante, though an in-

valid for some time, had never been confined to her bed, and died suddenly and painlessly at the last As has been related in a previous story, there were two families for whom the Señora and her granddaughter had formed a warm friendship—the Gordons, people who had bought a ranch near that of the Almirantes', and the Pages, living in town. A short time before her grandmother's death Ramona and her brother had spent some time at the Hot Springs, in company with the Pages, who had a relative, a young lady, visiting them from the East. Her name was Jenny Frost, and Ramona and she had become intimate friends.

When Alejandro Almirante rode in, on the evening of his grandmother's death, to tell the sad news to their friends, the Pages, Mrs. Page had offered to go out to *Casa Almirante* and remain with him and his sister until after the funeral. But the

boy, after a moment's hesitation, had replied:

"Thank you, Mrs. Page, but I think it will be better not. Adriana and Concilio, those old servants who were with grandmother long before we were born, are—you know how kind. And the Gordons are quite close, and besides I have telegraphed to our relations. I am sure my Aunt Ortega will come at once. She can be here by to-morrow night, and you have heard, Mrs. Page, she is a little—queer. No, we shall manage very well."

After he had gone the Pages began to discuss the possibilities of Ramona's future at the hands of her aunt, who, it was well understood, disliked the brother and sister, to whom, as the children of her son, the Señora had given love and shelter for so many years.

"Ramona will not trouble her long," said Mrs. Page. "She will now be free to follow her vocation, in which there is no

doubt she will be happy. As for Alejandro, he will have to go back to school as soon as possible. I think studies will be resumed at the college next week."

"I am afraid the Señora Ortega will not make it very pleasant for Ramona while she is there," said Mr. Page.

"The child will be welcome here," rejoined his wife. "Shall we invite her?"

"Let us see what happens first," replied the prudent head of the family. "If for the short time Ramona remains in the vicinity they can get along together, it will be best for all parties. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Page. "It would be well that Ramona should have a kindly feeling toward her aunt before separating from her for good. And perhaps death may soften the Señora Ortega."

"I hardly think it will," said Mr. Page. "She is an implacable woman. I have had some business experience with her; only

through correspondence, but still enough to make me fancy her exceedingly—difficult."

"Well, we shall see," rejoined his wife. "Ramona will always find our hearts and this home open to her. You and I will go over there before the funeral, Jenny—perhaps to-morrow morning."

But in the morning Mrs. Page had a bad toothache, which necessitated a visit to the dentist in the afternoon. Accompanied by Jenny, she went out to *Casa Almirante* the next day. The door of the house, with long black crêpe streamers pendant from the bell knob, stood wide open. There was no one visible in the hall or in any of the front rooms. In the long *sala,* darkened and filled with flowers and decorated with massive silver candlesticks, in which wax candles were burning, lay the Señora, clothed in a faded rose-pink gown, profusely trimmed with lace. A beautiful rosary of silver filigree was

wound about her folded hands. Her fine face looked calm and holy; after a long, harassing, and changeful life the Señora slept well.

As Mrs. Page and her niece, after a short but fervent prayer, rose from their knees and stood looking at the peaceful countenance, which, in spite of the inappropriate attire in which the form was dressed, had an air of dignity that no grotesqueness of grave-clothes could take away, they heard a sound behind them, and a stout woman entered, the rustle of her heavy silk gown jarring on the silence and solemnity of the chamber of death.

She stood inquiringly, and Mrs. Page turned again toward the door. She knew at once that this was one of the Señora's daughters, and said after they were again in the corridor:

"This is the Señora Ortega? I am Mrs. Page, a friend of the family."

"Yes, I am the Señora Ortega," rejoined the other, bowing politely to both. "Come in here, if you please."

She led the way to the room which had formerly been her mother's, now dismantled of all the furniture it had contained except three or four chairs, a table and a couple of carved chests on either side of the mantelpiece.

"My poor mother is gone!" she said, seating herself and motioning her guests to be seated also.

"You say you are a friend of the family, Madam," she continued. "Have you known my mother long?"

"Several years," replied Mrs. Page. "We come here quite often, and the children nearly always stay with us when they are in town."

"Oh!" rejoined the Señora Ortega, visibly stiffening in her chair. "Had you seen my mother lately—before her death?"

"A few days before. She was very frail,

but no one anticipated that she would die so soon."

"I should have been warned," said the bereaved daughter reproachfully.

"The Señora would not permit the children to write that she was ill," said Mrs. Page.

"From whom did you hear that?"

"From them."

"Oh!" replied the Señora Ortega with a scornful smile. "If you know the family so well, Mrs. Page, you know also the history of that boy and girl—and—that it would be to their interest to keep her own children away from my mother."

"Oh, they are not like that!" exclaimed Jenny impulsively.

The Señora Ortega looked at her coldly. "Perhaps you have not known them a long time, Miss?" she said.

"Only a few weeks," rejoined Jenny quite humbled. "But they are both so nice."

"Yes?" queried the Señora Ortega still more freezingly, and turned to Mrs. Page, who said:

"I can not see, Señora Ortega, how it would benefit those children not to have informed you of their grandmother's illness. They know very well that all she had belonged to her own children—that they would inherit nothing."

The Señora shrugged her shoulders.

"My mother knew it, of course," she said. "But that she had told them of it, I doubt. I am afraid, if she did, that the consequences would be even worse than they now are. Knowing that, they—specially the girl—would have the temptation to put away—out of the house—things that did not belong to her."

"I think you are mistaken, Señora," said Mrs. Page, with difficulty compelling herself to speak calmly. "They are both very honorable and deeply grateful to the

Señora. They expected nothing from her."

"*How* do you know it?" asked the Señora Ortega. "Did my mother tell you?"

"Your mother never spoke to me of her private affairs," rejoined Mrs. Page.

"*How,* then, did you know it? From the girl?" again asked the Señora Ortega, her voice rising as she spoke. It seemed to Mrs. Page that in a moment she would have added, "And is it in your house that she has been putting things away?"

Mrs. Page rose to her feet. Jenny followed her example; but her aunt only said as gently as she could:

"I can only repeat, Señora, that I know nothing of the family affairs of the Señora Almirante. Perhaps we might see Ramona for a few moments."

"She is not here," said the Señora Ortega, snapping her lips together.

"Not here!"

"No; I suppose she has gone to the house of her friends, the Gordons, who are also probably friends of yours."

"Thank you," replied Mrs. Page, and turned from the room. The Señora Ortega followed the visitors to the door, bowing them out in scornful silence.

"And that is what they call 'Spanish courtesy,' is it?" exclaimed Jenny indignantly. "What a woman!"

"No, my dear, it is not," said Mrs. Page. "She is known everywhere, I believe, for a shrew. She is nothing like her mother. Poor Ramona! I fear she has already had a bad time."

The Gordons had recently returned from a visit East. Mrs. Page found them all at home, but learned that Ramona, quite ill, had gone to lie down.

"I fear her aunt has been treating her unkindly," said Mrs. Page.

"Something occurred this morning which caused the poor child to ask shelter

here," rejoined Mrs. Gordon. "She came over inquiring if she might stay with us. Alejandro is here also, but he has gone to find the Padre Gaspara. Ramona has told us nothing. You know how reserved she is, Mrs. Page."

"Ah! Poor child," said Mrs. Page. "Tell her we were here—and as for the funeral—I think we shall only come to the church."

"I understand," replied Mrs. Gordon. "It will be the same with us. Other sisters and cousins are expected this evening, who will probably swell the ranks of the enemy. They won't care for us, either, Mrs. Page. We are considered Ramona's allies."

Neither at that time nor later did Ramona tell to her friends the story of her encounter with the Señora Ortega, which happened in this way:

As soon as that lady arrived she countermanded all orders that had been given for the funeral, renewing them herself,

with various changes, through the telephone. She ordered a very cheap coffin, saying that her mother had never liked display; and instead of the brown silk habit, which the Sisters were making for her burial, she took the Señora's wedding-dress from the chest, and insisted that she should be buried in it.

At this Ramona had ventured to remonstrate. "Aunt," she began.

"Do not call me aunt," cried the Señora Ortega. "Did I not tell you years ago that you should address me as Señora?"

"Well, then, Señora," pleaded the girl, "my grandmother had always wished for the Franciscan habit—she belonged to the Third Order. Indeed, she had already told the Sisters, as you will learn if you ask them."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. Even if you are telling me the truth, which I doubt, I ask you where is the money to come from to pay for that habit? Twenty-

five dollars, at least, it will cost. And where is the money to pay for it, with all the other funeral expenses?"

"I do not know where it is, Señora," replied Ramona meekly. "Probably wherever the rest of my grandmother's money was kept. It will be the last thing to do for her. I beg you not to put on her that faded dress, with the lace so yellow!"

"Faded! Lace so yellow!" exclaimed the Señora Ortega. "Do you know that lace cost dollars and dollars and dollars? I have already taken off yards and yards from the skirt. It would be a shame to put it in the ground."

Ramona shuddered and turned to the dressing-table, where her grandmother's rings were lying.

"What are you doing there?" cried her aunt, gathering the jewelry into a heap. "Not one belongs to you—not one. Not a pin, or a ring, or a chain. Understand that now, once for all."

"I do not want anything," answered the girl sadly, hardly able to speak for tears.

"Go out now," commanded her aunt. "Go out and send in here Adriana and Concilio, that we may have the bed taken down and put out of sight. The mattress will have to be made over. It is made of splendid hair, though it is at least twenty-five years old. It cost my father over a hundred dollars by the time it was brought around the Horn, when everything came by sea, before the railroads."

But Ramona did not hear the last part of her speech. She was already walking slowly toward the kitchen in obedience to her aunt's command to find the servants.

They came reluctantly, having all the Indian's dislike to dismantle a room in which some one had recently died.

After they had done what was required of them, Señora Ortega bade Adriana procure the keys of her mother's chests from Ramona. The girl brought them

herself and handed them to her aunt. The Señora proceeded at once to open the chests.

"There are a great many things missing," she said. "Where have they gone? When I was here last these chests were full. To be sure, I was not given permission to open them," she continued, darting a glance of fury at Ramona.

"How, then, did you know that they were full, Señora?" asked Adriana, who, expecting to be dismissed before long, did not hesitate to speak her mind.

"Snake of a snake!" exclaimed the Señora angrily. "Keep your viper's tongue behind your teeth! And you," she said, again turning to Ramona, "what has become of the things that were here stored away? Where have you hidden them?"

"I have hidden nothing," rejoined the girl. "But I know that my grandmother gave some laces and linen to Father Gas-

para for the altar, and to the Sisters, and a few to Mrs. Gordon and Mrs. Page."

"Ha! Your Pages and your Gordons! Right well do I know how they have cajoled my mother into giving them what rightfully belonged to her own children. I have not the slightest doubt but what, if one knew how to go about it, one would find many valuable things stowed away in their houses for their own and your own future use and enjoyment."

Adriana was about to begin an angry speech, but Ramona silenced her with a look.

Taking a large rosary of silver filigree, with a beautifully carved ivory cross, from the mantelpiece, she began to pass it slowly from one hand to the other, as she said quietly:

"Señora, I shall never need, and I do not desire, any of the things you mention. I know nothing more than I have told you."

She was about to leave the room, when the Señora Ortega laid a rough hand on her arm.

"Where are you going with that rosary?" she asked. "Lay it there where you found it."

"It is mine," replied Ramona. "My grandmother said many times that it should be for me when she was gone. And that ivory crucifix yonder is for Alejandro."

"It is true; I have often heard the Señora say it," cried Adriana, in a loud, aggressive voice.

"Thieves, and spawn of thieves!" cried the Señora Ortega, snatching the rosary from Ramona, and pushing both her and Adriana violently in front of her till she reached the door. "Go back to your work, Adriana and keep a still tongue in your head, or you will be on the road sooner than you think. And you, impudent girl, if I could send you back to the mountains,

where you belong, this day, this very day, I would do it. You are an offense in my sight."

"I shall not offend you longer, Señora," replied the girl calmly, walking toward her own room. In half an hour she had packed all her things and sought shelter with the Gordons.

CHAPTER II

RAMONA'S MOTHER

THE Señora Ortega had always made herself so obnoxious and had been so overbearing to the neighborhood of *Casa Almirante* that very few of the residents came to pay their respects and offer their condolences at the house of death. They preferred to wait till the day of the funeral and attend the obsequies at the little church where the dead woman had worshiped for more than fifty years, and which had always been the recipient of her bounty.

Late that afternoon, after Mrs. Page and Jenny had gone, the Señora determined to go into town and purchase some mourning, while awaiting the arrival of the family. When she had departed, Adriana summoned Ramona to the bier of her grandmother, upon which she had been

laid during the day. Tears sprang to the girl's eyes as she knelt beside it, and gazed upon that beloved form, attired so inappropriately for the grave. But she tried to forget it in the contemplation of the beloved countenance, to which death had added a new dignity.

After a time, lifting her face from her hands, she rose and bent over to kiss the cold lips, allowing her own to rest for a moment also on the ivory crucifix attached to the beads, which those dead lips had so often pressed. As she lifted her head she became aware that some one was standing near her. It was Father Gaspara.

When he followed her into the hall, after a few words of consolation, he said, "My child, Adriana has told me of what occurred this morning. I wish you could have remained in the house until after the funeral, at least. But perhaps 'tis better as things are. They would make it unpleasant for you. And you will not be

dependent, Ramona. I have in my possession several hundred dollars which your grandmother saved for you and Alejandro. That is between us three. And now is there anything that you would like as a remembrance?"

"Nothing, Father, but the rosary my grandmother gave me, and which my aunt took from me this morning. It is now wrapped around my dear grandmother's hands."

"I remember well that she used it always. And she had already given it to you?"

"Yes, Father; and the ivory crucifix in her room was for Alejandro."

"Where is it now?"

"It was still hanging over the mantelpiece this morning."

"Ah! Very well. Had your grandmother another pair of beads, my child?"

"Yes, Father, they are—in the escritoire at the end of the hall—several pairs."

"Is it open?"

"I think so, Father."

"Go and get one."

Ramona obeyed him and returned in a few moments with a long pearl rosary.

"Give it to me," said the priest. "And wait here."

He went back to the *sala,* and gently removing the silver rosary from the closed hands, replaced it with the one Ramona had brought him.

"God rest you, dear soul," he murmured. "I am doing what you would have wished."

Returning, he gave the beads to Ramona. "Take them, my child!" he said. "They are rightfully yours. There is no one who would prize them so dearly."

"But, Father," answered Ramona, "you do not know my—the Señora Ortega. She will be very angry, and perhaps accuse me of stealing."

"*I* do not know the Señora Ortega?" he said. "Well, perhaps not. But I knew her very well when she was the Señorita Almirante, and I am sure time has not changed her nature. Have no fear, Ramona; neither she nor any of the others will molest you. The responsibility rests on my shoulders. Come now for the ivory crucifix."

With quick, determined steps he led the way to the room where the crucifix still hung. Removing it from the wall, he placed it in Ramona's hands. Then he said to her:

"Go now to your friends, the Gordons, and I will wait for the Señora Ortega. Alejandro is there—I have already seen him."

Ramona knelt for his blessing. "God bless you and keep you, my child," said the priest, his voice trembling with the emotion and memories which the present sad occasion had brought to the surface. Clasping the rosary to her heart, Ramona

hastened across the fields to the friendly refuge which had been extended her and her brother.

When the Señora Ortega returned, laden with bundles, but without her relatives, whose train had been delayed, she found Father Gaspara walking in the corridor, reciting his beads. There had always been a silent feud between these two; she had been the firebrand of the impetuous family, continually setting adverse forces in motion, and constantly endeavoring to bend the others to her will.

After a somewhat cold greeting, during which the sincere and rather brusque priest had not offered even the accustomed words of consolation to her voluble regrets for the loss which had befallen her, he asked abruptly:

"Señora Ortega, why have you put upon your mother that dress she might have worn in her youth to a *baile?*"

"It was her wedding-dress, Father!"

rejoined the Señora, in affected surprise. "What could be better?"

"The habit of the Franciscans of the Third Order—in which she desired to be clothed for burial—would have been far better," said the priest. "You should have had regard to her wishes. It was a cruelty and a disrespect to dress her as you have done. I can not think that her other daughters will approve. You should have awaited their arrival."

"They are three wasters and spenders, and have been all their lives!" rejoined the Señora Ortega. "I alone, of all the Almirantes, know the value of money. I am the eldest and should have charge. I came first—while the others lingered."

"Did not Ramona tell you what her grandmother wished?"

"And do you think I would allow that scum of the earth to give me orders, or tell me anything, Father? You have always upheld my mother in her craziness

for those children, and I can not forgive you for it. They have already gone from here. Do you know it?"

She spoke sharply, in a defiant voice. Father Gaspara lifted his hand.

"Softly, softly, Señora Ortega," he said. "Remember who is lying there in the *sala* —one who can never speak again on earth. But, if she could, well—I will tell you, Señora, that she would lift up her voice in praise of that boy and girl who have given her naught but love and consolation."

"Ha! Padre Gaspara," said the Señora Ortega spitefully. "I've often heard, and I can almost believe, that it was *you* who so influenced my mother that she cherished those vipers more tenderly than her own daughters."

"Who never cherished *her* as daughters should," replied the priest. "You are not far wrong, Señora Ortega. They were the apples of her eye, the children of her

best-beloved. It may not be pleasant to hear it—but it is true that had it not been for them, especially Ramona, her life would have been very desolate and lonely. Yes, Señora Ortega—they were the joy of her soul."

"Ah! But you make me angry, Padre Gaspara!" hissed the Señora Ortega, clenching her hands. The priest remained silent for a moment, then he said:

"I have understood, Señora, that the rosary in silver filigree, which her grandfather brought from Spain, was for Ramona Almirante, after her grandmother's death. Also, I am assured that the ivory crucifix that hung in her bedroom—once the property of your brother, the father of Alejandro—was to be given to his son. I have taken the liberty to remove the rosary from the coffin and have substituted another. The crucifix, also, I have sent to the boy. Further than this, the children ask nothing. And I hope, Señora, that

God will forgive you for turning them out before their dead benefactress had been buried."

"Ah!" once more muttered the Señora Ortega, but this time under her teeth. In spite of her shrewish and arbitrary disposition, she had that inmost reverence for and fear of the displeasure of the priest which lies dormant in the soul of the least religious among the Spanish women.

"Well—I shall say nothing," she rejoined, after a moment's pause. "But it is hard—very hard." Raising her handkerchief to her eyes, she affected to weep.

"Pardon me, Señora," said the priest. "I am staying at Felipe Castro's to-night. I will say Mass for your mother early in the morning. And afterward, when the rest of the family are here, we can arrange for the funeral."

"Very well, Padre Gaspara," replied the Señora Ortega, and so they parted.

The youngest daughter of the Señora

and her husband were unlike the others. There were also some cousins who were not unfriendly to Ramona and her brother, though they had never seen them until now. They insisted on the return of the children to *Casa Almirante,* but Father Gaspara thought it best to let them remain where they were. In spite of the protests of the Señora Ortega and the Señora Valdes, her sister, the men of the family, husbands and sons, saw to it that Ramona and Alejandro occupied a prominent place in the funeral *cortège.*

But it was at the grave that the crowning blow was given to the pride of the Señora Ortega. It is the custom among the Spanish for the nearest relative to throw the first spadeful of earth, after the priest, when the coffin has been deposited in the grave. After the customary prayers, when the time arrived for this ceremony to be performed, Father Gaspara dropped a shovelful of earth upon

the coffin. Then, although the Señora Ortega pushed her reluctant husband forward so roughly that he almost fell into the open grave, the priest said in a low but firm and clear voice, looking toward Alejandro: "Alejandro Almirante," and handed him the spade, thereby virtually establishing his right of priority. There was acquiescence from the group, at least by their silence, with the exception of the Señora Ortega, who, uttering a long-drawn "Oh!" fell in a swoon, whether real or simulated she herself best knew, and was conveyed to the carriage in the arms of her husband.

Alejandro went back to school the day after the funeral, and Ramona remained with the Gordons. Adriana and Concilio were left in charge of the house until such time as the ranch should be sold.

About a week after the funeral, Mrs. Page and Jenny drove out to see her and invite her to pass some time with them.

They found a dilapidated, two-seated buckboard in front of the Gordons' door. The harness had been mended with rope; the horses, however, were in very good condition. An Indian sat in the vehicle, quite a good-looking man, past middle age. As the visitors approached the steps of the veranda they saw that it was occupied. Ramona was seated there, looking very pale, but sweet, in her black gown; beside her was an Indian woman with a small child in her lap. She was not as dark as the majority of her race, and must have been pretty in her youth, but she had become too stout now for comeliness.

She rose as the strangers came into view. Ramona laid her hand upon her arm, and leaving her chair, came forward to welcome the visitors. After a few words had been exchanged, she said, taking the woman's hand:

"This is my mother! She has just come

down from the mountains to see if she could do anything for me. Wasn't it kind?"

The Indian woman smiled shyly.

"She does not speak English—though she understands it," said Ramona. "And this is my little half-brother," taking the boy in her arms. "Hasn't he beautiful eyes?"

"They are like yours," said Jenny.

"Yes," rejoined the mother, well pleased.

"She is disappointed not to have seen Alejandro," continued Ramona. "We had not thought of her coming." Then as her mother, speaking in Spanish, told her she must go, Ramona, excusing herself to the visitors, accompanied her to the vehicle, saluted the Indian, her husband, and kissed the child. But between mother and daughter no caress was exchanged. They did not even shake hands. There was a gulf between those two that nothing could ever bridge; they parted as strangers part,

the mother gazing stolidly forward as she drove slowly away.

Only the child looked back, smiling and waving his hands—the swarthy Indian child with Ramona's eyes.

Mrs. Page and Jenny were embarrassed, wishing they had chosen another time to call, but Ramona did not seem to be. She came back presently and resumed her seat.

"I had a little disappointment just now," she said slowly, "but I probably deserved it. I should not have meddled with the past. My mother, replying to some questions of mine, gave me some information about my father's youth. When she was finished—I can not say why I was tempted to do it—I asked her whether she had not loved him very much better than the man to whom she is now married—an excellent man, I have heard, who loved her before my father did, and waited many years for her after my father had

died. And what do you think she said?"

Without waiting for her visitors to reply, Ramona, with a pink flush now on her cheeks, continued:

"She said she liked this husband best—that she had always liked him, but my father persuaded her. It made me feel like crying—a little. My poor father—isn't it sad for him?"

"Ah, no," said Mrs. Page. "He has long since passed to a better place—and while he lived he did not know it."

"I am glad that Alejandro was not here," Ramona went on. "Although he lived with our mother several years—and loved her then—he has always had a dread of seeing her again. It was very kind of her to come. Do I look like her at all?"

"Not at all," responded Jenny.

"Except the eyes," said Mrs. Page.

"Yes, except the eyes," added Jenny.

"And yet," said Ramona, with a gentle

smile, "I have been reproached for the Almirante eyes. My relations thought I had no right to them."

"Ramona," said Jenny hesitatingly, after a short pause, "do you love your mother at all?"

The girl looked at her pathetically, though she was still smiling. "I am afraid not—at all," she answered very slowly, shaking her head. "My grandmother was my real mother, Jenny. It was she that I loved—how well I know only now that I have lost her."

CHAPTER III

A TRIP TO THE OLD MISSION

RAMONA spent six weeks with the Pages, six happy but busy weeks, and then left them for the novitiate. After she had gone Jenny felt quite lonely, but Nellie—still a child—though she regretted Ramona's departure, was glad to have her cousin to herself again, and began to plan various excursions and recreations to be taken during the winter, which was now fairly upon them. That is, such winters as they have in southern California, where very few trees shed their leaves, and the hills, after the first rains, begin to assume their garments of green, and all nature seems to be a riot of spring. Yet the days were decidedly cooler and the nights often cold.

"It seems strange, Nellie," said Jenny

one morning as the cousins sat chatting and sewing, "to be sitting here by this pleasant fire, with the sun shining so brightly outside and the roses and lilies in bloom. And later, when we go out for a walk, it will be almost too warm in the sunshine. I believe I like winter best in California."

"I don't," said Nellie, "because in winter we never go to the mountains or on camping trips of any kind."

"But one could go to the mountains and enjoy it if one wanted snow," said Jenny. "For my part I am glad to be away from it for one winter."

For some weeks Nellie had suffered from an affection of the eyes, which obliged her to remain from school. The doctor had forbidden her to read, but on the previous day the embargo had been removed and she was now permitted to sew and read a little, under restrictions.

"I wonder if Mama would let us go

horseback riding to the old Mission. Just you and I alone together," she said.

"I think she would," said Jenny. "It would be delightful, and perfectly safe, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes! What could be the danger?" exclaimed Nellie. "We can get a couple of good horses from Duffy—take our luncheon and have a perfectly lovely day."

"Is there any one living at the Mission now?" asked Jenny. (The school had been closed at the end of the scholastic year the previous June.)

"I don't know," said Nellie. "But that wouldn't matter. The olive-grove and pepper-trees are still where they were and we can get all the water we need."

"Why did they close the Indian school?" asked Jenny.

"The Bishop thought it best to send the children to Banning," said Nellie. "There

is so little money coming in now from the Indian fund that it's cheaper to have one school than two."

"The tourists will miss a great deal in not seeing the Indian children," said Jenny. "But the Mission will always be interesting as long as it stands."

Mr. and Mrs. Page thought the proposed trip would be safe and pleasant, though they would have liked Walter to accompany the girls. However, this seemed to be impossible, as practising for a school play filled all his Saturday holidays.

As has been said before, Jenny was very lively, and Nellie was growing up to be very much like her. Mrs. Page therefore laid various instructions on both of them as to prudence in riding up and down the steep grades, etc., which the girls faithfully promised to observe.

Mr. Page had ordered two good horses. They set off one Thursday morning in

November, with every prospect of a pleasant day.

"Mama, I think we'll go round by the Gordons' and see if Bessie can't come with us," said Nellie. "You know they have a very good saddle-horse."

"Very well," rejoined Mrs. Page. "It would please me very much if Archie could go also. I do not much like the idea of your riding about alone all day. I shall feel anxious, though your father says I'm foolish."

"Well, we'll ask Archie, then, if he can spare the time," said Nellie as they cantered off.

"Who is Archie?" asked Jenny, who did not know the Gordons very intimately.

"Archie is the eldest son," replied her cousin. "He's twenty-five; he's been in the East, but came back last week. He's nice, but awfully solemn."

"I hope he won't come with us, then," said Jenny. "But I suppose we shall have

to ask him, if he's at home, as Aunt Fanny would like to have him with us."

"Yes," replied Nellie. "He isn't so dreadfully solemn, either, Jenny, nor cross, you know—but serious. I don't believe you'll care for him."

"Well, I suppose I can endure him for one day," laughed Jenny.

When they reached the Gordons they found all the family absent except Bessie and the Indian servant. Bessie had a felon on her thumb, from which she had suffered intensely for some days. Although it was rapidly growing better, she felt obliged to decline the invitation, and reluctantly to forego a trip which she would have greatly enjoyed.

"What's the meaning of that granite bowlder on the Plaza?" asked Jenny as they rode past it through Old Town.

"It's in memory of the flag-raising by Stockton and Fremont more than sixty years ago," said Nellie. "I know some of

the family very well whose great-aunt made the first American flag ever raised in California. There are several romantic stories about it."

"What are they?" asked Jenny, always keen for a story.

"You know the Americans claim that the Spanish flag was captured by Commodore Stockton."

"Yes, I've read that, of course."

"Well, these old Californians say that the flag was never hauled down or captured by the Americans."

"Do they? Why do they claim that to be so?"

"One of the girls told me she heard her grandmother say that when the ship of Commodore Stockton entered the harbor of San Diego nearly all the Spanish men of Old Town hurried to the hills."

"That wasn't a very brave thing to do, was it?" said Jenny.

"No, but it has happened before," re-

joined Nellie, with an upward tilt of her pretty nose. "There was one man, though, who had the courage to stay. The women were not afraid, they said, and were all gathered in the Plaza."

"They must have rejoiced at the presence of their protector," said Jenny.

"I suppose they did. There was a beautiful Spanish girl there. Her grandfather had been an admiral, and her father was the most prominent citizen of Old Town. She said to this solitary man, 'Why do you permit the flag of your country to stay there, floating from the flagpole until it is hauled down by the Americanos?'

" 'How can I get it down?' asked the young man.

" 'Cut it down,' said the beautiful Ysadora. So the *caballero* took his knife from his boot and hacked at it till the pole fell, and the flag with it."

"What became of it then?" asked Jenny.

"They hid it somewhere."

"Has it ever been found?"

"I don't know."

"Probably they burned it. She had courage, didn't she?"

"Yes, but there's more to the story. I don't like to spoil it, but she was the very person who made the first American flag that was raised over the Plaza. She and her sister made it out of blue and white muslin and a red flannel petticoat."

"She ought to have been more loyal, after what she said to the young *caballero,*" remarked Jenny.

"Her family had always liked the Americans," said Nellie. "The girls all married Americans."

"Well, then, perhaps she did it to taunt the *caballero.* It was natural."

"She is still living!" said Jenny.

"Still living! I should like to see her."

"She's not here—the family live in Los Angeles now," said Nellie.

The two girls rode slowly round the

Plaza, surveying the historic cannon captured from the Mexicans, and then turned their horses' feet toward the river. After crossing the bridge, they came to a path leading through an abandoned fruit-orchard, which Nellie said was a shorter and pleasanter way to their destination. The trees had been neglected, and nearly all of them were withered, except an old sycamore on the edge of a "dry-run," where grew a tangle of bushes and wild vines.

"We used to have such fun watching the woodpeckers in that tree, when we came to see Ramona long ago," said Nellie.

"Do you suppose there are any there now?" asked Jenny. "I love to watch them."

"We can look," said Nellie. "Yes, there are a crowd of them."

A bevy of the gay-looking birds were swooping down upon the sycamore. They

did not seem to mind the presence of the intruders.

"Do you know what they do, Jenny?" asked Nellie. "They make holes in the tree first, and then come back at another time and put acorns in them. See! That's what they're doing now."

From where they stood the girls could see the blighted side of the sycamore riddled with large holes. To these holes came the woodpeckers, each with an acorn in its mouth, which they placed in the cavities, flying away for more, and returning again and again.

"They're storing them for winter," said Nellie.

"That's what I had supposed," answered Jenny.

There were three of the birds that seemed to be directing the others. They did not fly about like their companions, but hovered here and there around the tree, holding an animated conversation

and occasionally trilling. As the other birds came to deposit their acorns these directors would make a noise that sounded like "Ja-cob, Ja-cob."

"We shall never get to the Mission if we linger here much longer," said Jenny at last. "Don't you think we'd better go?"

There were a few lemons lying on the ground under the neglected trees; wild cucumber vines covered the outlying bushes and a delicious scent from the lower part of the orchard betrayed the presence of the sweetbriar rose.

"There's a house behind those two live oaks," said Nellie. "I didn't know there was one in this orchard, though we've been here many times. Shall we go over that way instead of along this path? We can take the turnpike road afterward. I would like to know what kind of people live there."

"If you like," replied Jenny, who shared her cousin's curiosity.

The little hut, for it was no more, they found closed. There were a couple of old rags hanging on the line stretched between two trees, and a bucket of clean water standing on a bench beside the door. But there was no human being in sight.

"Some one lives here," said Jenny. "Shall we look in the window?"

"I wouldn't," rejoined Nellie. "There may be a man inside."

"Come, then, let's be going," said Jenny. "We really have no business spying on our neighbors."

After they had gone a man who had been lying on a couch under the open window hurriedly rose and looked after them. He was an Indian with bloated, repulsive features, his eyes bloodshot and bleared from drinking. He opened the door and stood in the path near it, watching them for some time.

"It is the daughter of the lawyer," he said to himself. "The other one I do not

know. But the horses are good. I am sure they go to the Mission."

He sat on the bench for some moments with his head in his hands. At last he said:

"It is worth while. If they go there they stay some time—I will follow."

He went back to the house, put on a tattered felt hat which hung near the cot and began to walk with rapid strides in another direction from that which the girls had taken. After a while the walk became a run. Climbing the little hills with the speed and agility of a deer, he kept the girls in view as long as he could.

It was almost midday when the girls arrived at the Mission. It was very quiet under the olive trees, where they tethered their horses and sat down to eat their luncheon.

"If the Sisters were here now," said Nellie, "they would give us a pitcher of milk."

"If the Sisters were here and the school

open I would like it better," said Jenny. "It is beautiful, but very lonely. I don't believe it is safe. The stillness seems unnatural. I move that we go back as soon as we've eaten our luncheon, instead of exploring around as we had intended to do."

"I'm surprised at you, Jenny," said Nellie. "There isn't a particle of danger."

"I feel creepy," replied her cousin.

"First let's go up inside the Mission garden and get a couple of tiny pepper-trees," said Nellie. "I've been wanting them such a long time to plant in the back garden at home. And this is the season for transplanting them. I can fasten them to my saddle—they're very light."

"Very well," said Jenny. "But after that we must start for home."

Their luncheon finished, the two girls left the olive grove, lingering a moment to admire the giant palms at the entrance, and climbed the hill to the school grounds.

They opened the large gate with some difficulty, and began to pick their way over the ruins of the Mission, lying midway between the buildings comprising the girls' and the boys' Indian schools, now closed and untenanted.

"I feel better here," said Jenny. "The sunshine is pleasant. It was very shady and somber down there in the orchard. How beautiful those pepper-trees are! I don't wonder you're anxious to plant some in your garden."

CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTERIOUS HORSE THIEF

AFTER they had examined the garden the two girls began to look for something with which to dig up the little pepper-trees. There were dozens from which to choose. Nellie finally decided upon four, and having found a long, slender stick, she proceeded to loosen the earth about their roots. A convenient gunnysack lying near at hand was used for wrapping around the saplings. When their work was completed, Jenny proposed that they sit for a while in the shade on the porch of the Boys' School.

As they sat there, each leaning against one of the porch columns, the silence all about them was intense. Suddenly they heard the clatter of horses' hoofs—very near.

"Some one is coming," said Nellie. "It sounds like two horses!"

"They seem to be going," answered Jenny, "and at a great pace. Strange we didn't see any one about, or any horses, isn't it?"

"I wonder if they could possibly be our own—running away?" said Nellie.

"I do not think so; they were fastened well, and had plenty of grass," answered her cousin.

"We'd better go and see," said Nellie anxiously.

They hurried down to the orchard, to the spot where the horses had been tied. They were gone, and on the ground lay the two side-saddles which the girls had used.

They looked at each other in amazement and discouragement.

"Some one has stolen them!" cried Nellie. "What shall we do?"

"Walk back to town. Is there anything else to be done?"

"Nothing—unless we should meet some wagoner on the way, who will give us a lift. And papa will have to pay for the horses!"

"Nellie," said Jenny solemnly, "the thief who stole the horses, whoever he may be, was hiding about here while we were eating our luncheon. I'm sure of it; I never had such a queer feeling—it was just as though some one was watching us. Once I almost thought I saw a head moving behind that old cider-press. Let's get away from here as fast as we can."

"What shall we do with the saddles?" asked Nellie. "Papa will have to replace them as well as the horses if they're lost."

"Let's put them behind the cider-press and cover them with a lot of brush," said Jenny.

"I wish we could lock them up somewhere," said Nellie.

"But we can't—and there isn't much

danger that the thief will come back for the saddles. If he had wanted them he would have taken them with the horses. If we hide them over there for the present they can be sent for to-morrow."

"Well," rejoined Nellie sorrowfully. Dragging the saddles after them to the spot selected by Jenny, they laid them down and began to pile brush upon them.

"What is this?" said Jenny, stooping to examine a small package on the ground. It was wrapped in a piece of soiled muslin and tied with a piece of red tape.

"Shall we open it?" asked Nellie. "It may belong to the man who took the horses."

She picked up a piece of paper, and wrapping the package in it, put it in the lunch-basket. Then, with a gesture of disgust, she carefully wiped her fingers on her handkerchief.

"Your father may be able to use it to

identify the thief," she said. "And now what shall we do?"

"Start," replied Nellie. "We're seven miles from home, and it's nearly three o'clock. I'd rather go through the fields and over fences, wouldn't you?"

"I think it would be better to follow the road," answered Jenny. "That way we shall be more likely to meet some one who may take us up."

"But what shall we do with the pepper-trees?"

"Take them along," replied Nellie. "They're very light."

"We can carry them by turns. Come, Nellie; let's start," said Jenny. "We can't get away from here too soon."

Through the olive orchard, along the quiet lane leading from the Mission to the highway, the two girls took their way, till they reached the road, and began to trudge through the deep sand which the winter rains would soon turn into a swiftly flow-

ing river. Fortunately, they had not gone more than a mile when a wagon caught up with them. The driver, a farmer going to town with produce, asked them to ride. They thanked him and took their places in the wagon, telling him of what had happened to their horses.

"I should say it was an Indian did that," said the man. "Some of them are great horse-thieves."

"It was a foolish thing to do," said Nellie. "He will certainly be caught."

"Very likely; but maybe he was drunk. Girls like you ought not to be riding about alone."

"We think so now," said Jenny, "though we were not at all afraid this morning."

After they had gone about four miles Nellie whispered to Jenny: "Let us get off at that road yonder, walk to the Gordons', and telephone for Walter to come out with the buggy and get us. I don't

like to go into town on top of this wagon—and we look too forlorn to take the street-cars when we get there."

"A good idea!" replied Jenny. The farmer would have been glad to take them all the way, he said, but under plea of visiting a friend they left him, after having expressed their gratitude for his kindness.

When they came to the orchard they had traversed in the morning, Nellie proposed going through it again, as the shortest way. They found the door of the little shack open. There was nothing inside but a canvas cot and a chair. A half-eaten turnip lay on the box that had served for a table. Nellie proposed resting there, but Jenny preferred to keep on. The Gordons had returned from town and were greatly surprised to see the girls arriving on foot. Bessie suggested telephoning to Mr. Page that they would stay all night, but they were not willing to do this. Archie thought

it desirable to give information about the horses immediately. He telephoned to the stable; Duffy said he would come himself with a buggy for the girls. He appeared in half an hour.

"A runaway Indian is guilty," he said. "Take my word for it—you will hear tomorrow or next day of some fight or rumpus in the back country in which Indians were the principal actors. The fellow will do one of two things. After trying both horses to see which is the fastest, he will either sell the other or let it loose and it will come home. My horses know every inch of this country from Julian to Mexico. I think it likely he'll not try to sell, or it would cause him to be suspected. What was the man like?"

"We didn't see any one," said Jenny.

"I thought you heard the clatter of horses' hoofs and saw them galloping off."

"No; we heard the clatter of hoofs, but before we could get back to the olive grove

where we had tied them, they were far out of sight. The saddles are safe behind the old cider-press of the Mission Fathers."

"I'll telephone for one of my men to go out for them at once. Those saddles cost me seventy-five dollars apiece—and the horses are worth fully three hundred. But I'm not anxious—they'll come back."

"I'm afraid Mama will never let us go out riding again alone," said Nellie. "I was hoping we were going to have such good times that way."

"There are plenty of fine roads nearer town where you can ride," said the liveryman. "It's better for young girls not to go too far by themselves."

"Now that I think of it," said Archie Gordon, "there's been an Indian hanging about that shack in the old Curtis orchard for the past two days. I saw him yesterday morning when I went looking for

some tree props. There are a lot lying around on the ground there, you know."

"What was he like?" asked Duffy.

"I wasn't close to him, but he seemed rather short and thick-set."

"What was he doing?"

"Lying under a tree the first time I saw him, and sitting on a bench near the door the next morning. I thought perhaps he'd come for the lemon 'culls' that are lying thick as snow over there. I've often seen Indians going away with baskets-full from the orchard."

"Come over with me and we'll see if he's there still," said Duffy. "If not, it's likely that he saw the girls, followed them by a short cut over the hills, and made away with the horses."

"There was no one in that shack when we crossed the orchard," said Jenny. "The door was wide open and we looked in."

"It won't hurt to look again," said Duffy. "We may find something." But they soon returned, saying they had found no one.

"If you young ladies are ready," said the stable-man, "I'd like to get back to town as soon as possible. I have some telegraphing to do and must be quick about it."

The girls said good-by to the Gordons and got into the buggy. In less than half an hour they were at home, as they traveled quickly behind two fast horses.

Mrs. Page was astonished to see them alight from the vehicle at the door. Fearing some accident had occurred, she hastened to meet them. But her anxiety was soon relieved. After they had told her their story she said:

"My dear children, we ought to thank God for your narrow escape. Perhaps if you had been near the horses that man might have killed you both, especially if

he is already a fugitive from justice, as Mr. Duffy supposes."

But Walter laughed at the idea. "I don't believe it was any fugitive from justice," he said. "You know how Indians love horses. Some of them can never resist stealing one if they have a chance. Probably he was tramping along down from Warner's or Julian or Mesa Grande, and, seeing the horses, just took them."

"He wouldn't have been tramping from any of those places you name, Walter," said Nellie oracularly, "unless he was trying to get out of some scrape. You know very well that all the mountain Indians have horses and good ones. They never dream of walking to town. And if it *was* an Indian and he *was* tramping, he had done something wrong, because if he hadn't a horse of his own he could have borrowed one from a friend."

"Well, then, perhaps he'd been working at some ranch, was paid off, and was look-

ing for work somewhere else. He could have tramped it, then, couldn't he? I stick to the first proposition—that he saw the horses, was tempted, and took them. Very likely he'll get frightened before he has gone many miles, or perhaps he has another job by this time. In that case, if he only wanted to cover the road quickly, he'll let them go, and they'll be back to the stable to-night."

One of the horses, the worst of the two, made its appearance at the stable that night, the proprietor reported next morning.

"I'm inclined to think," he said to Mr. Page, in whose office he was relating the occurrence, "I'm inclined to think now that the fellow has gone over into Mexico. I've just telephoned down to the *rurales* to keep a sharp lookout."

"The man may have been intoxicated," said Mr. Page, "and in that condition he may have sold the horse."

"That's true," rejoined Duffy. "I have friends all along the line, and they'll be looking out for the horse. I've done the same for them before now."

All that day and part of the next various speculations were indulged in regarding the probable result of the unfortunate affair, which, if the horse was not found, would be likely to cost Mr. Page a considerable sum of money. But when he came home to luncheon next day he announced that the horse had been recovered and was now in the stable, having suffered no injury, but that it had evidently been ridden hard.

"Where was it found, Father?" asked Walter.

"Two miles below Ti Juana, near the Hot Springs. It had wandered from some point below the line, Duffy thought. Very likely the man got frightened when he found himself in Mexico and saw the *rurales* constantly patrolling there. I sup-

pose he took to the bushes on foot. There can hardly be a doubt now of his having been a criminal, trying to escape from justice."

"Do you have to pay much, Father?" inquired Nellie.

"Nothing at all. Duffy wouldn't take a cent from me. I have done two or three things for him rather cheaply, and he says I'm always sending him people. So he let me off scot-free."

Every one now being relieved of anxiety, life seemed about to resume its usual tenor, when something happened that promised to be much more serious than the foregoing adventure.

When Mr. Page returned from his office that evening he looked unusually grave.

"I have some bad news," he said. "You all remember Dionysio?"

"Remember Dionysio!" exclaimed Walter. "I should think we did, Father. He isn't dead?"

"He might better be dead if what they accuse him of is true," replied Mr. Page.

"What has he done?" inquired Walter. "Or rather, what do they accuse him of doing? No one could make me believe that Dionysio could commit a crime."

"Indians have hot tempers," replied Mr. Page. "In anger any man may do that which under ordinary circumstances he would be the first to condemn. If Dionysio has really committed the crime of which they say he is guilty, I'm sure it was in a moment of passion."

"But what is it, Father?" asked both children impatiently.

"He is accused of having murdered Hernando, the Portuguese,"[1] said Mr. Page.

[1] Read "The Children of Cupa."

CHAPTER V

THE PLIGHT OF DIONYSIO

"O PAPA, how dreadful!" cried Nellie. "Tell us, tell us quickly, how it happened and why they think Dionysio did it."

But at this crucial moment Mr. Page was summoned to the telephone, giving Jenny time to ask: "Who is Dionysio, and where does he live?"

"He is an Indian—whose people lived at Cupa," said Walter. "He was sent to the Indian school at Carlisle by some people because he was such a bright boy. He was there four years, but when he came home he had to work just the same as the others."

"But why shouldn't he?" asked Jenny.

"The idea was to fit him for something better," said Mrs. Page. "He learned

wood-carving, but could get nothing to do in the large cities of the East. As he did not want to be very far away from his grandfather and grandmother, he went back to Cupa. He was a very nice boy."

"He was as sensible as Solomon—and he had the *best* disposition. *He* never committed murder; *no, sir!*" exclaimed Walter.

"He has the sweetest little sister," said Nellie, almost in tears. "Her name is Margarita. Aunt Mary wanted to adopt her, or something, and take her back East with her. But Dionysio wouldn't give her up."

"Once this man Hernando, that papa told us was murdered, tried to steal Margarita. She was related to his wife," continued Nellie.

"He was a pedlar," interrupted Walter. "He used to go about in a wagon selling all sorts of things. We were out in the woods one day and Margarita was with

us. We missed her, and Francisco found her. Hernando had her in the wagon taking her home. A little while after we came away Dionysio married a nice Indian girl and took Margarita to live with them."

"Where is the ranch, Mama? Do you know?" asked Nellie.

"Somewhere near Rincon," replied Mrs. Page. "The people who own the ranch do not live there. Dionysio and his wife and her father and mother take care of it."

"And did Hernando live there, too?" asked Nellie.

"I do not know where he lived. I've never heard."

Mr. Page reappeared, looking extremely troubled. "They have been telephoning me from the jail," he said. "Dionysio is there and wants to see me; the constable brought him down on the train this afternoon. Francisco and Mauricio came with him. They ask me to meet them at the jail to-night."

"How did it happen, Papa?" asked Nellie.

"I know nothing about it," rejoined her father. "After I have seen and been able to talk with the Indians I may be able to tell you more. It's a very sad affair."

While they were still at dinner the bell rang, and presently Josefa announced that Mauricio and Francisco had come. They could not wait any longer to see Mr. Page.

"Give them something to eat and then send them to me in the library," said Mr. Page. "Would you like to come in, Mother?" he continued, addressing his wife.

"May we go?" asked Walter. "Papa, you know how we all liked Dionysio."

Mr. Page reflected a moment. "You may come," he said. "Later I can send you away, if necessary."

When the Pages entered the library Francisco and Mauricio were already

there. They rose, greeted them, and then Mauricio said:

"This is unhappy business."

"Dionysio never killed him," blurted out Nellie. "He is too good."

"So I think," said Mauricio. "But it looks bad for him."

"Mr. Page will get him off," said Francisco confidently. "He may have to stay in jail for some time, but Mr. Page will get him off."

"Is Hernando really dead?" asked Mr. Page.

"He is dead. He was found lying at the door of his own stable."

"But why has Dionysio been accused? Had they quarreled?"

"I think so," replied Mauricio. "A little quarrel they had. But not to make a man kill. If you will come down to the jail with us, Mr. Page, where Dionysio is expecting you, all that he knows will be told."

"I will go with you at once," said Mr. Page, to the great disappointment of Walter and Nellie, but to the relief of the older women, who felt they were out of place under the circumstances. For the first time Francisco seemed almost oblivious of the children he loved so well; his heart was filled with sorrow for the dangerous and unfortunate plight of his friend Dionysio.

Mr. Page found the accused young man sitting on the cot in his cell. He was calm, but apparently very much discouraged; Indians have a terror of the law—it seems to them a very formidable thing, and many of them are under the impression that they will not get fair treatment.

"Tell me all about it, Dionysio," said the lawyer, taking his hand. "I assume that you are innocent, as your friends say you have declared."

"I am innocent," rejoined Dionysio.

"But everything seems against me; to prove my innocence will be hard."

He paused, straightened himself, and covered his eyes with one hand.

"Whenever you are ready," said Mr. Page, after a moment.

"I am trying to think," said Dionysio. "Everything seems so strange.

"As you know, Mr. Page," he began, "we are living on the Balder ranch, near Rincon—my wife, her parents, Margarita, the baby and I. Everything has gone well with us—always. Luisa, my wife, is a fine girl. Though she is not related to me by blood, we are both cousins of Veronica, who was married to Hernando. Do you remember, Mr. Page, that he tried to steal Margarita when you were at the Springs?"

"I remember it very well."

"And you also know, perhaps, that Veronica, his wife, sometimes got drunk, and Hernando himself also?"

"Yes, I remember."

"They came about a year ago to live about two miles from us. Sometimes I would see Hernando and he would ask me to let Margarita go to them for a visit, but I would not, for they were not good people for her to be with."

"I understand."

"Veronica we never saw. But three weeks ago she passed with him in the wagon and they came to our house. In there at the time were Juan Fabian and Diego Perez, and Hernando asked again for Margarita. I would not let her go, and Veronica, who had been drinking, began to talk very loud and to call names. To her I said nothing, but I sent out my wife from the room. Hernando laughed at the things Veronica said, and it made me angry. 'It would be better for you to take her home,' I said. 'Rather than to be laughing at a poor woman who does not know what she is saying—and your wife.'

And then she cried out, in a very loud voice, that my mother had not been a good woman, which I do not believe is true—but if it be true, I do not want to hear. I took her by the shoulders and pushed her out, and he struck me. Juan Fabian came between, or I would have knocked him down. Then Diego Perez got into the wagon with them, and turned the horses for home—for by then we saw they were both drinking, the man and the woman. And as they went they called back to me very bad names in Spanish, worse than which no man can say to another." Dionysio then repeated the opprobrious epithets to which he referred.

"I stood in the road and shook my fist at them, Mr. Page, and that is all I know."

"How long ago was that?"

"About three weeks. I never saw Hernando, the Portuguese, again till I saw him lying dead in his house."

"Where was he attacked?" asked Mr. Page.

"At nine o'clock he said to Veronica: 'I will go out and see why the horse is making a noise in the stable.' He did not come back; she went out and found him lying on the ground with his head broken. He was dead—I went over with others to offer help. After three days they came to my house and arrested me."

"What caused your arrest?"

"Juan Fabian and Diego Perez had been talking about the quarrel. Those two men did not mean to do me harm, but they have done it."

"And there is no other evidence?"

Mauricio and Francisco exchanged glances, and Dionysio added in a low voice:

"There is more, Mr. Page. I have three red handkerchiefs with a blue border—very nice, that a lady gave me in Philadelphia six years ago. They are silk. I

do not wear them often around my neck, but when there is a fiesta or something. I went down to San Luis Obispo last time and took them all three, because in the running and jumping one gets so warm, and I like to change. I am very proud and careful of those handkerchiefs. Last week Luisa washed them one day, and that evening they were gone. She thought the wind had blown them away, and we looked, but could not find them. One handkerchief they found on the ground close to the body of Hernando. Every one knew it was mine. There are none like it anywhere around. Do you see?"

"Ah!" responded the lawyer. "That may be bad—and it may not."

"Does any one think that to commit a murder I would put on the fine silk handkerchief I wear only at a fiesta?" asked Dionysio. "How foolish that would be, Mr. Page."

"It would seem so," rejoined the lawyer, "but the assertion that you wore it only on holidays would not help you much in court, Dionysio. Can you give an account of yourself for that evening?"

"I was at home—I am always at home."

There was some further conversation, from which Mr. Page learned that Juan Fabian and Diego Perez, having been in the neighborhood the night of the murder, had helped carry in the body, and had testified at the inquest. After it was over one of them said to the other:

"This will be bad for Dionysio; he will be sorry now that the last time he saw Hernando they had quarreled," which remark, having been repeated, had excited the first suspicion of the coroner and led to Dionysio's arrest.

The next morning the preliminary examination was held, and Dionysio was remanded to jail to await the action of the Grand Jury, then in session. In a few

days an indictment was returned and his trial set for two weeks later.

Although Mr. Page was not in the habit of appearing in the Criminal Court, he waived his disinclination in this case for the sake of Dionysio, whom he liked and respected and in whose innocence he fully believed. A few evenings before the trial began he was summoned to the library to see Juan Fabian and Diego Perez, who had been subpœned by the prosecution.

The two men were feeling very sorry that they had been called to testify against their friend Dionysio, whom they had unwittingly placed in a dangerous position, and wished to know if there was not some way by which they could evade the command of the law and qualify as witnesses, if they must appear, on the side of the prisoner. Mr. Page could not help smiling at their simplicity. He answered them that Dionysio appreciated the situation in which they were placed, and bore them no

ill-will, but that it would be impossible to interfere with the procedure of the law in the manner they desired.

"You must only tell the truth," he said. "I feel satisfied that the prosecution will not make much out of your testimony. The handkerchief having been found is about the worst feature. However, we will do our best for poor Dionysio. I am not much afraid that he will be convicted, unless some new testimony be developed."

"That is one thing," remarked Juan Fabian, who was middle-aged and a man of some experience in his own limited way, "but to be set free and yet not to have known who is the real murderer is another thing. As long as that lasts there will be a foul stain upon the name of Dionysio."

"One thing at a time, my friend," rejoined Mr. Page. "Something may develop in the trial which will open the way to disclosing the identity of the

person who killed Hernando. Had he enemies, or was he a man that was well liked?"

"He had not enemies, I think," said Diego, "but neither had he any friends. He was very stingy and fond of getting money, and sometimes a cross man. It is said that he would sell liquor to the Indians, which is against the law, as you know, Señor, and then he would report them to the constable—to keep good friends with him."

"It seems to me that fact would have made him many enemies," said Mr. Page. "No one knows what the trial may bring forth. Meanwhile, let me again assure you both that Dionysio bears you no malice."

The men went away, feeling better pleased than when they came. Their satisfaction was increased by the fact that as they were about to leave the house Francisco ran out from the kitchen, where he

was visiting Josefa, and invited them to have some coffee and tamales, which he assured them were piping hot. He had a friendly motive in this, knowing that they had expressed themselves as averse to giving testimony that might injure Dionysio's cause, but he wanted to prove it to his own satisfaction by their manner and speech. This he did, and after a pleasant evening with Josefa, the three men went away together with the best of feeling.

The next morning Mrs. Page and Jenny had some shopping to do. After they had finished Jenny suggested that they call at the office for her uncle. They found the room full of Indians, men and women. Two or three were sitting on chairs, others on the floor, while several men stood in a row, with folded arms, against the wall.

Mr. Page introduced the two ladies at once. "This is my wife and niece," he said in Spanish, having some slight acquaint-

ance with that language. The whole assembly rose and bowed gravely. Mauricio and Francisco they already knew, but the others were strangers.

Francisco came forward from the corner where he had been standing and said to Mrs. Page:

"Señora, will you speak to the wife of Dionysio, and to his parents? They are over there by the window?"

He led her to a group sitting somewhat apart—a group consisting of an old man and woman, thin and careworn, both bent and scarred with hard work and privation, and a comely young Indian girl with a child in her lap. The old people could not speak English, but the daughter spoke it fluently and seemed quite intelligent. She was very quiet, but tears stood in her eyes as Mrs. Page told her she felt sure her husband would be acquitted.

"How else can it be when every one knows he has been so good?" she replied.

The old people nodded and smiled to let Mrs. Page see they appreciated her sympathy. Mr. Page came with them to the door.

"I am glad Jenny has had a chance to see a sort of Indian pow-wow," he said. "More than half those people are in the way; I shall have to clear them out and then get down to business with the few that are really necessary. But one has to go slowly with them—they are here to show their esteem and sympathy for Dionysio and his family. Two great wagons of them were unloaded at the street door an hour ago. Do not expect me to luncheon—I shall be too busy."

"When they were in the elevator going down Jenny said:

"If this were a story in a book, Aunt Fanny, it would relate how the wife of the accused fell on her knees with emotion at sight of you and kissed your hand at parting. How calm, I might say how digni-

fied, those people were. Is it stolidity, do you think? Do they feel?"

"They certainly do," replied Mrs. Page. "They are wonderfully kind and affectionate to their children and their old people. We have found them as grateful, also, as the average white man or woman. But I have never seen an Indian kiss the hand of a white woman—or any woman—and I have never known them to kneel, even under stress of the greatest obligation—except to Almighty God."

CHAPTER VI

AT THE COURTHOUSE

JENNY was very anxious to assist at the trial. So were Walter and Nellie, but their father would not permit the children to go, saying that a Criminal Court was no place for young people. Mrs. Page would have preferred not to attend, but as the case promised no revolting and but few harrowing features, and she knew her niece would be disappointed if she declined accompanying her, as in that case she could not go either, she decided to attend the trial.

They found the courtroom literally overflowing with Indians, numbers of whom also lined the sidewalks in front of the courthouse. They stood in rows three and four deep between the windows and in the back part of the room. There were

several very old men, a couple of old women, who had evidently come to support the father-in-law and mother-in-law —and a great many young men, with a few stout, middle-aged women.

The ladies were accommodated with an excellent seat, which the clerk of the court had saved for them at the request of Mr. Page.

"I don't see any young Indian women here," remarked Jenny to her aunt as she looked around the room.

"They would not think of allowing the young girls to come to such a place as this, unless they were obliged to," replied Mrs. Page.

"White people might take a lesson from them in that, as well as other things," said Jenny. "I imagine if Dionysio were a white man there would be many of his girl friends here."

"That would depend upon circumstances," rejoined her aunt. "But the

chances are that they would, unless they were not permitted to enter by the officials. I am told that women, young and old, crowd the courtroom at murder trials."

"People may be making comments on us," said Jenny. "However, this is an exceptional case. I have never had a desire to attend such a place before, and do not think I shall again, but I am very deeply interested in Dionysio."

At that moment the prisoner, in charge of the deputy sheriff, was brought into the courtroom. His face bore traces of suffering and anxiety, but he was neatly attired in dark blue trousers and flannel shirt, with a red handkerchief knotted loosely about his neck.

Behind him came his wife and child; Luisa was neatly dressed, as were her old father and mother, following in her wake. Dionysio took his place in the prisoner's dock, his wife beside him, the old people seated immediately back of them.

"What a vicious face the murderer has," Jenny heard a woman say as the sad procession passed.

"Whom do you mean?" asked a masculine voice.

"That murderer!" was the reply.

"You should not call him a murderer until he is proven guilty," said the other. "For my part, I think he has a fine face."

"That's because you're a crank," retorted the woman, laughing. "I don't believe there is a decent Indian in the world!"

Jenny ventured to cast a glance behind her, and saw that the speakers had pads and pencils in their hands. Presently they moved forward to the vicinity of the judge's bench, and she realized that they were newspaper reporters. "Poor Dionysio!" she thought. "I'm glad his fate is not to be decided by that cold-hearted, unjust creature."

The clerk announced that court was opened; the judge entered and took his

seat, as did also the lawyers on both sides. After a few preliminary remarks the empaneling of the jury was begun. There was some difficulty in securing twelve—as two or three of them averred they were prejudiced against Indians, as a rule, and one declared he would not believe an Indian under oath. This gave Jenny another spasm of indignation.

Finally the list of the jurymen was filled and the trial begun. Juan Fabian and Diego Perez were called first, by the prosecution. They testified in substance what the reader already knows. Their testimony was given carefully and honestly, but reluctantly.

The wife of the murdered man was the next witness. She had evidently been at some pains to keep herself in good condition for the occasion. She manifested no emotion when questioned, said that her husband had come home late on the evening of his death, telling her, after they had

eaten supper, that he was going out to look after his horse; that when he did not return she went in search of him and discovered him lying dead in front of the stable. She could not tell how long a time had elapsed between his leaving the house and being found stretched on the ground.

"An hour?" questioned the prosecutor.

"I do not know."

"Half an hour?"

"Maybe."

When shown the red and blue silk handkerchief that had been found beside him, she was asked if she knew to whom it belonged.

She remained silent for a considerable time, hung her head, twisted her fingers and looked in a peculiar manner at the prisoner.

Being commanded to answer the question, she said in a voice so low as to be hardly distinguishable:

"I think to—Dionysio."

"Had you ever seen this handkerchief around his neck?"

"Yes."

"Were your husband and the prisoner good friends?"

"Yes."

"Had they not had a quarrel?"

"A little—not much."

Several other questions were asked, which brought out the fact that the woman bore no ill-will against the accused. On the contrary, the impression she gave was that she did not believe him guilty of the murder. She had not made a good witness for the prosecution; in fact, there did not seem to be any good witness for the prosecution.

Mrs. Page and Jenny contrived to send a smile to Dionysio and his wife as they passed close to them on their way out. When they reached the door they found Mauricio and Francisco with the wife of Hernando.

"I want to ask the lawyer something," she said to Mrs. Page.

"What lawyer?"

"Your husband," she said.

"I think she must mean the attorney on the other side," said Mrs. Page.

Mauricio addressed the widow in Spanish. She answered him in the same tongue.

"No; it is Mr. Page she wants," said Francisco.

"Here he is now," exclaimed Jenny.

The group had moved away from the door in order to allow the crowd to pass. When the Indian woman saw Mr. Page approaching she stepped forward.

"I want to ask you," she said, "if it is true that the silk handkerchief may hang Dionysio?"

"You mean that the fact of its having been found near your husband's body will help to prove that Dionysio killed him?"

The woman nodded. "It will go a long

way toward doing so. Explain to her, Francisco."

The man said a few words to her. She listened attentively, asking several questions.

"That is very much against Dionysio," reiterated Mr. Page.

"Too bad, too bad!" she muttered, and walked away with her head cast down. Two or three women joined her on the sidewalk.

"She does not seem to feel any bitterness toward Dionysio, does she?" remarked Jenny.

"She acts very strangely," answered Mr. Page. "She seems to have something in reserve. Cross-examination may bring it out."

When the afternoon session began, those who knew him, and there were few in the city who did not, were surprised to see Father Gaspara enter the courtroom with the widow of Hernando, and seat himself

beside her. During the morning his tall, stately figure had been seen hovering near the outskirts of the groups of Indians, where he could usually be found when any of "his people" were in trouble.

When the widow of the Portuguese was called in cross-examination to the witness-stand, she arose, looked appealingly at the priest, who rose also, and accompanied her as far as he was permitted to do through the aisle. "Courage! All will be well!" he said, as she left him. Every one who witnessed the scene felt that something unusual was about to happen.

Before Mr. Page could begin to question her, she clasped her hands, threw them upward, and cried in a loud voice:

"As God sees me, I do not know if Dionysio did the killing, but it was I—I who stole the handkerchiefs from the line of Luisa, and Hernando took them from me, to put them back."

Having delivered herself of this confes-

sion the poor creature began to sob violently. She was led to a seat, and the examination discontinued until she had recovered. Father Gaspara stood by her encouragingly; the defense announced that they would not cross-examine.

That morning at breakfast Mr. Page had said that the first move of the defense would be to prove an *alibi.*

"What is an *alibi,* Father?" asked Walter.

"Proving, or endeavoring to prove, that the accused could not have been on the spot at the time the murder was committed. For instance, Dionysio lived two miles from Hernando; he will have to establish proof that he was not in the neighborhood at the time."

"How can he do that?"

"By the testimony of those who knew him to be at home, or at some other place than the scene of the murder, between the hours of nine and ten."

"And can they do it?"

"Very easily, I should say."

"Who will testify to that?"

"His wife and her parents. His own testimony will also be accepted."

"Shall you put him on the stand?" Mrs. Page inquired.

"Decidedly. He will make an excellent impression. He will tell a straightforward story. I have hardly a doubt but that we shall establish an *alibi.*

"And will that finish the case?" asked Nellie.

"It ought to—but in order to strengthen our side still further we shall produce witnesses who will swear to his good reputation. We have many more of these than we shall need. The men through whose unguarded talking he was denounced, with the constable who arrested him, have already been made to show that in every respect his character has always been good. I have never known any prisoner, white

or Indian, with more friends than Dionysio."

"And then will he go free?"

"That is as the jury decides. I feel confident that he will be acquitted. But until the real culprit is found there will always remain a stain upon Dionysio's name."

"Has no one else been suspected?" asked Mrs. Page.

"No one, I believe. Hernando was not a favorite, but he does not seem to have had any actual enemies."

The *alibi* was not difficult to prove. The testimony of the old people, given through an interpreter, as well as that of Luisa, seemed to be convincing. When Dionysio was himself put on the stand, as Mr. Page had foreseen, he made an ideal witness. Cross-examination by the prosecution served to confirm the good impression. The turn which the confession of the widow had given to the case elicited still further sympathy for the accused among

all classes and shades of color. Several Indian reservations seemed to have emptied themselves into the courtroom on behalf of the prisoner.

But the dramatic moment was reached when, just as the last witness had been examined, and the lawyers, in earnest conference, were holding the spectators in suspense as to what their next move would be, a handsome boy of fourteen with flushed face and sparkling eyes, whom several of the audience recognized as Walter Page, entered the courtroom, and walking quickly up to the enclosure where counsel were assembled, with a few whispered words, laid a small package in his father's hand.

Then there was another conference between judge and lawyers, which lasted so long that many persons rose and left the courtroom. Mrs. Page and Jenny were in a fever of curiosity; they endeavored to catch Walter's eye, but the boy, slightly

embarrassed, did not look around. As his father had not dismissed him, he took a seat not far from Dionysio, whose glance he sought and received with an encouraging, one might say a triumphant, nod and smile. At length the judge announced that court would adjourn for the day, and the disappointed crowd, still unenlightened as to this phase of affairs, emptied itself quickly into the corridors.

CHAPTER VII

DIONYSIO ACQUITTED

WE PRESUME our readers are feeling some curiosity as to what had occurred. It was, as often happens, the unexpected. When Walter returned from school at half-past two he found Josefa talking to an old Indian, who, she informed him, was her grandfather.

The man could not speak English, but he bowed in a friendly manner to Walter's salutation. Then he went to his wagon, which stood in front of the house, and pulling out a sack from beneath the seat, produced some nuts.

"He wants to give you some," said Josefa. "He brought them for Dionysio; the Indians are filling the jail with things for him, but he can spare some."

"Oh, they are real walnuts!" exclaimed Walter. "We haven't had any for two years."

He ran into the house, returning a few moments later with the lunch-basket which Nellie and Jenny had taken with them the day they had made the disastrous trip to the Old Mission. He had found it on top of the kitchen closet, where Josefa had put it out of the way. He turned back the lid and was holding the basket open for the nuts when he saw something lying on the bottom.

"Wait a moment," he said, throwing out what he thought was a piece of folded paper. Josefa picked it up—she was a neat girl, very much averse to seeing scraps of any kind lying on the path she swept so carefully every morning.

"There is something in this," she said, feeling it. "Shall I open it?"

"Yes, do," rejoined Walter. "Maybe you'll find some money." But Josefa was

in no hurry. Balancing the package between her fingers she said good-by to her grandfather and slowly retraced her steps toward the kitchen, followed by Walter.

"Josefa, I am going to crack a lot of these nuts," he said. "Please get me a glass dish and I'll fill it and put it on the sideboard. Mother likes walnuts—she'll be surprised."

"All right," rejoined Josefa, laying the paper on the kitchen table and going to the dining-room for the dish. She looked at the clock and was somewhat astonished that it was after three. "My windows will never be washed at this rate," she said, handing the dish to Walter and forgetting all about the package.

Walter got the hatchet, took the nuts outside, and cracked a quantity. Returning to the kitchen, he saw the package and called out to the Indian girl at work in the dining-room:

"Josefa, I'm going to open this paper."

"All right," she answered. "But you must give me half—I saved it."

"I will," replied Walter, unfolding the paper. In a moment he was crying excitedly, "Come here, Josefa! Come here! See what I have found. Money!"

She came running. Several gold pieces lay disclosed in the bit of linen rag in which they had been wrapped. Josefa glanced at them, but her observant eyes quickly rested on something else.

"Gold, yes," she said indifferently, much to the surprise of the boy. "But see here! What does this mean? There are the blue and red silk handkerchiefs of Dionysio. I know them. There are none others like them. How came they here?"

There they were—two handkerchiefs that had apparently been folded in with the linen cloth containing the money. Walter lifted them and shook them out.

"There it is!" exclaimed Josefa again. "The diamond figures in the center and the

little leaves all round the border. So pretty and fine they are; every one will know they are the handkerchiefs of Dionysio. But how came they here?"

"How, indeed?" queried Walter, amazed. "You don't suppose Francisco——"

But Josefa interrupted him excitedly:

"Walter!" she cried reproachfully. "For what would Francisco do such a thing? Steal the handkerchiefs of Dionysio? Indeed no—he may not have them of silk, but he is no thief. Francisco—O Walter!" and Josefa began to cry.

"I didn't mean that! I didn't mean that at all," exclaimed the boy, excited in his turn. "I'm sure I like Francisco as well as you—I guess better. I was only going to say that I wondered if he could have found them and hidden them away in the basket, hoping to do Dionysio some good. But how that could do him any good it's hard to say."

"Foolish!" cried Josefa. "If you talk that way you may do Francisco harm with the judges—instead of good to Dionysio. And how can Francisco find that basket away on top of the dark shelf in the kitchen, where he never comes?"

"Yes, he comes sometimes," rejoined Walter, beginning to resent Josefa's warm partisanship of the boy whom he considered his own especial property.

"And if he came *every* day it would still be the same," answered Josefa, sobbing.

"Well, Josefa, I'm surprised at you," said the boy. "I'm not going to tell you any more that I didn't mean anything against Francisco, who is a much greater friend of mine than he is of yours."

"He is not!" answered Josefa, now violently weeping. "If any harm should come to him through this—I could burn the old handkerchiefs."

She made an effort to snatch them from

the table, but Walter prevented her. A light came to Walter.

"Perhaps you and Francisco are thinking of getting married," he said mischievously, regarding her with laughing eyes.

"It is true," replied the girl again, drying her tears and beginning to smile. "At Christmas, we had decided—if your mama can get some one before."

Then Walter sat down and whistled. But he held on to the handkerchiefs. Presently he said:

"But it's Dionysio we must think of now, Josefa. How do you suppose the handkerchiefs came there?"

"I do not know," rejoined Josefa thoughtfully, now quite appeased. "Since the day they went to the Mission that basket has not been away from the shelf. It must have been in when I threw it there."

"Well, it's a mystery," said Walter. "The thing to do now is to take it right

down to my father. And I'm going to do it."

"And please excuse me that I got angry," said Josefa. "I was frightened, and I know very well now that Francisco is your friend. And please do not say anything yet to your family—till I have seen and talked with him again."

"But I must tell about it now, at once!" replied Walter.

"I mean — about — Christmas," said Josefa shyly.

"I sha'n't say a single word," promised Walter.

"But the money! How much?" asked Josefa.

They counted it; it amounted to fifty-five dollars.

"I guess it isn't ours, Josefa," said the boy, carefully fastening the package as he had found it, the gold rolled tightly in the linen cloth, folded over many times, the handkerchiefs again wrapped about the

smaller parcel, and the paper over all. Then he seized his cap and hurried away, feeling elated, delighted, important, at the discovery he had made and pleased with the idea that he was now legitimately entitled to enter the precincts of the court-house, previously forbidden him by his father.

After the unexpected incident which had occurred, Mrs. Page and Jenny waited in their seats for some time, hoping to be able to speak to Mr. Page. At length Walter came down to them with a message, saying his father wanted to see Jenny in one of the anterooms.

"Jenny," he asked when she came, "what do you know about this?" at the same time holding up the package.

"Nothing, uncle!" she rejoined in surprise.

"It was found in the lunch-basket you and Nellie used the day you went to the Old Mission."

"Ah! I do remember," replied the girl. "While we were covering the saddles with brushwood to hide them behind the cider-press, I saw a little parcel lying on the ground. It was a linen cloth tied with string. I picked it up, thinking it might have been dropped by the man who stole the horses. I felt as though he had been moving behind the cider-press all the time we were eating luncheon. It looked so soiled and greasy that I wrapped it in a piece of paper and forgot all about it. It is strange, too, that neither of us thought of it again. What is it, Uncle? Who found it?"

"Walter and Josefa," replied Mr. Page. "I wrapped it up again just now to see if you would recognize it. Here it is."

He unfolded the parcel, disclosing the handkerchiefs. "The man who committed the murder and the one who stole the horses must be the same," he said. "This discovery will practically establish the in-

nocence of Dionysio in the eyes of the jury, if they are not already convinced of it. The next thing to do will be to find the real culprit. You will have to give your testimony to-morrow, Jenny."

"I'm ready," rejoined the girl. "There will not be much to tell."

"And Nellie?" asked Mrs. Page.

"I think we shall be able to get along without Nellie," replied her husband. "I will think about it; corroborative testimony is always strengthening. Now, I'm going out by the back entrance to the jail. I want to see Dionysio and to get away from the crowd of Indians that are probably still waiting for me on the sidewalk. And very likely there are a dozen or more already established in the office. Walter, take your mother and cousin home."

Returning, they found the courtroom deserted; a bailiff in front of the building was telling the Indians to "move on." As they scattered in groups, a covered wagon,

driven by a Mexican, by whose side sat a sanitary policeman, came into view. Within a swarthy man half lay, half reclined against a pile of sacking. He looked very ill.

"Why all the Indians?" he inquired in a feeble voice of the Mexican.

"No se," answered the driver.

"A murder trial," said the policeman. "A young fellow, an Indian called Dionysio, from Rincon, is accused of having murdered a Portuguese pedlar. It seems they had a quarrel and he threatened the pedlar. A handkerchief was found belonging to the young fellow on the spot where the murder was committed."

"What has been done? Is it over?" asked the sick man.

"No—I think not."

"Will they hang him?"

"If they find him guilty I suppose they will."

The man did not reply.

Leaning back once more against the sacking, he began to cough so violently that his companions feared he would strangle. The Mexican stopped the wagon, went into the drug-store and got him a drink of water. Then they proceeded to the City Hall, and after a permit had been received, the man was taken to the county hospital.

When court convened on the following day the lawyers made short work of Dionysio's case. Jenny was called to the witness-stand and related the story of the finding of the package. Nellie was not made to testify, much to her satisfaction, for she had passed an almost sleepless night in fear of being summoned.

Josefa and Walter were also obliged to go upon the stand. The testimony all being in, the lawyers on both sides waived argument, and the judge charged the jury, who retired to deliberate.

In fifteen minutes they returned with

the verdict—"Not Guilty." If the accused had been a white man with his previous good record it would have been received with loud applause. But though the courtroom was filled with Indians, who had come many miles to show their sympathy for their comrade, thereby demonstrating in the most sincere and practical manner possible in what esteem they held him, there was no display of enthusiasm or emotion. A low murmur ran through the room—much nodding of heads and many grunts of satisfaction were seen and heard, but there was no clapping of hands, no cheers, no display of any kind.

"The prisoner is discharged," said the judge. Dionysio, losing his self-possession for the first time, looked in a helpless, confused way at the bailiff standing beside him, who had conducted him to and from the jail. The man smiled. "You are free —you may go," he said.

Dionysio stood up, stretched his arms,

and uttered a long-drawn sigh of relief. The jury extended their hands—the attorneys also; the face of the Indian flushed; he smiled, but could not utter a single word. In a few moments he found himself in the large courtroom that but a short time before had been reeking with humanity, alone save for his wife, her parents, and Mr. Page. Luisa laid her hand on his arm; he took it and pressed it. The old man and woman said something in their own language, which the Indians always use when deeply moved. He answered in the same tongue.

"How can I thank you, Mr. Page," he said. "I do, but I can not tell you, and as soon as possible you will be paid. I can not do all now, at once, but little by little."

"Say no more about that, Dionysio," rejoined the lawyer. "I am paid already. This morning Mauricio and Francisco came to me with a purse of ten golden

eagles which they had collected among your friends. It is thus that your people have shown how they feel toward you, Dionysio."

The young man did not reply; he bit his lips tightly, and turned his eyes away. Then saying a word to Luisa, he took the baby from her arms and led the way from the courtroom.

The Pages were awaiting them in the corridor. Their congratulations made, Dionysio had to face the rows of Indians gathered on the corner.

"Ayo!" he said as he reached them; and then, his baby crowing on his shoulder, his wife plodding along beside him, the old couple and a long procession of Indians bringing up the rear, Dionysio, a free man, turned into the jail to gather up his few belongings and go back to the mountains.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MURDERER'S CONFESSION

AT DINNER that evening the Page family were discussing the affairs of the day when Mr. Page was summoned to the telephone.

"Father Gaspara wishes me to go with him at once to the county hospital," he said. "A man is dying there who needs my services. Father Gaspara will meet me at the end of the car line with his buggy and we will go together."

When he had gone the well-worn subject was resumed with many conjectures as to the identity of the Indian who had stolen the horses.

"I was talking to Francisco before dinner; he is in the kitchen," said Walter. "He says there is no one missing from the reservation since the murder. And there were

no strangers seen there at that time. I hope the guilty one may be found, on Dionysio's account."

And thus the talk went on until Mr. Page returned.

"Events have moved swiftly to-day," he said, seating himself with a sigh of satisfaction in his accustomed chair. "The man whom Father Gaspara wished me to see was the horse-stealer, and what is more important—the murderer of Hernando. He has made a dying confession, which I have taken down and hold safely this moment in my pocket." They all gathered eagerly around him.

"Are Mauricio and Francisco in the house?" he asked.

"Francisco is," replied Walter.

"Well, call him in," said Mr. Page. "He will like to hear the story I have to tell."

Walter disappeared, coming back in a moment with the two men and Josefa. "I

have good news," said Mr. Page. "Sit down, all of you—I am going to tell you about it. It is very admirable how Providence arranges things," he began. "The other day an Indian was found lying in the bushes near Ti Juana nearly dead from pneumonia and exposure. A Mexican who was coming up took him into his wagon, having been advised by the customs officers to convey the man to the hospital, as he said he belonged in San Diego County.

"They were passing the courthouse when the Indians were coming out from the trial. The sick man asked what was going on and they told him. When he arrived at the hospital the doctor assured him his time was very short, and he asked that Father Gaspara be sent for.

"When the priest came he recognized the Indian at once as having when a boy been an inmate of the Mission School, and later a very hard case, who had been sent

to San Quentin for four years for stabbing another Indian at a fiesta while intoxicated. He gave him the last Sacraments and then sent for me. I will now read to you, in his own words as nearly as possible, his dying confession."

"It would be Pablo Soula," whispered Mauricio to his nephew. Francisco nodded.

"You are right, Mauricio," said Mr. Page, and began to read:

" 'Being of sound mind, but ill in health, probably dying, I, Pablo Soula, formerly of the Cupa Reservation, later of Rincon, declare this to be my full and free confession:

" 'In October, four years ago, I was tried and convicted of attempt to murder Salvador Blanco and sent to the penitentiary at St. Quentin for four years. The man who informed on me—after selling me liquor that made me drunk, which is against the law—was Hernando the Por-

tuguese. I swore to kill that man when I got out, but after I was in the prison I did not think much of that. When my time was finished last October I went back to Rincon. I got there in the evening, by stage, part of the way, and had to walk four miles at the end. In the stage was a Mexican boy, who had plenty of whiskey, and we drank it. By the time I got out of the stage I was drunk; I meant to lie down in the bushes and sleep, but soon I heard a bell and thought of the pedlar. I looked out—it was Hernando. Then I was as mad as before—it was the whiskey that did the job.

" 'I followed him through the bushes, maybe half a mile, till he came to his house. I did not know whether to strike him, and I had nothing to do it with. I hid behind the barn while he put away the horse and wagon. I found a baseball club on the ground. When he came out from his house again I had been asleep. But I

woke up, and my head ached so that I could not see very well. I was very mad and very drunk. I went behind him with the baseball club and hit him a crack on the head. I thought: "*That,* Hernando, for my four years at San Quentin." He did not speak or cry out. Something fell from his pocket. I picked it up and put it in mine; it felt like money. Then I walked about a mile and I went in the bushes and slept. When I woke it was early morning. I felt that I had done a bad job, and lay all day in the bushes. At night I walked till I came to a ranch-house. I got there some bread, some milk, and an egg. The next day I did the same way, and then at night I came to the old orchard, and remembered the shack that was there when I was a boy at the Old Mission. I slept all night and part of the morning. I saw two girls pass on horseback and knew one to be Miss Page, and thought I might steal the horses and

go down into Mexico. I supposed they were riding to the Mission. I went quickly over the hills and got to the Mission before them. I hid behind the cider-press and watched them. When they went up to the garden I took the horses and hurried away. When evening came I knew it was foolish to have both, so I let one loose. Two days later I let the other go, for I was afraid of the *rurales,* and hid in the willows by the river. I had crossed to the Mexican side, but I found so many people coming there that I went back to the bushes. A woman gave me half a loaf of bread and some beans on the way to the river. There I lay for many days—I was sick. Then the man saw me and brought me here. That is all.' "

A long silence ensued—every one was deeply impressed. Finally Mauricio said:

"A good thing that this happened—otherwise Dionysio would not have been

cleared. No one thought of Pablo, or knew he was free."

"Has he no relatives?" inquired Mr. Page.

"Not any; his father and mother are long dead. His sisters also. His grandmother was one of those who, when Cupa was abandoned, fled to the mountains rather than go, and starved to death."

"I asked him about the package," said Mr. Page. "He had opened it, but was afraid to use the money lest he should be suspected. He had it in the pocket of his blouse and dropped it behind the cider-press, I suppose, where Jenny found it. He did not miss it, and would not have cared if he had, as it might have led to his arrest. He has asked to see Dionysio. I think Dionysio has gone there with his father-in-law. Pablo will probably die before morning. And now, Master Walter, your friend can walk with head erect

through the world, without a stain upon his name."

"Thank God!" murmured Mrs. Page reverently, and the others answered "Amen."

Many of the Indians had already gone home, but there were a number still in town from Mesa Grande, El Capitan, and Rincon, with others from Pala, which was now the home of the Cupeans, to which tribe Mauricio, Francisco, and Dionysio belonged. Pablo Soula died the night of Mr. Page's visit, and though he had been a ne'er-do-well from his youth, the Indians determined to take his body back to his native mountains and lay it to rest among the bones of his ancestors.

Father Gaspara was consulted and gave his approval. "But first," he said, "we will have Mass here, in the church, as you can not have it at Rincon. He died penitent,

poor fellow, and we must give him all the prayers we can."

He ordered Mauricio to get together as many of the Indians as possible, and tell them to come to the church at the stated time. It was a poor little funeral; about fifty Indians, men and women, were assembled, lingering at first with their usual dislike of asserting themselves, in the back of the church. It was Dionysio who marshaled them forward—close to the bier. A few white people, principally the Pages, were also in attendance. After the Mass, Father Gaspara, in his quaint but expressive manner, spoke as follows:

"I am glad to see you, my dear children, whom I have loved and for whom in past days I labored long, here gathered around the coffin of your friend and one-time comrade. And my soul is filled with sadness when I gaze upon that coffin, and upon you all—for I can not deny that as his life has been, many of the lives of his people

are also, and why? I will tell you, my people.

"I have known this boy Pablo since he came to the Mission School, at twelve years of age. There were none there better or brighter than he. For five years he remained, trusted by his teachers and by me, with every promise of becoming a good man. He went away—in two years who would have known him? What poison was it that dulled his eye and thickened his speech and caused his hands to tremble and his feet to stumble, turning the night into a time of orgy and the day, when he should have been laboring for his bread, into hours of deep, heavy slumber?

"What poison had converted him into an unsightly and useless thing, who had been skilful and ready in all labor and usefulness? What poison had made him a blot on the earth? What poison had instilled into his soul the fury of rage, causing him to attack and wound his comrade,

thereby condemning himself to years behind the gray, gloomy walls of the State prison?

"What poison, I ask you, had incited him, the very day of his return, to fall upon the man who had been—or whom he thought had been—his enemy, and murder him in his sins? What poison, still doing its dire work, was—as a consequence of this murder—the means of bringing in peril the life of an innocent, God-fearing young man here in the midst of you? A man whom I will take the opportunity of presenting to you as an example of what one who has always been a stranger to that poison can be. Are his eyes clear, his stature erect, his hands firm, his feet certain? I know that, if this were not the House of God, you would answer me with one accord."

All turned their gaze toward Dionysio, who looked very uncomfortable and hung his head. But Luisa was smiling.

"But to continue," said Father Gaspara. "What poison, I repeat, is that which has laid your friend here in an early grave, which makes hungry and ragged your children, like animals and demons the husbands and wives, which fills the calabooses and jails, the hospitals, and prisons, the poorhouses and lunatic asylums, the graves in the church-yard? The name of that poison is ***DRINK***. I would like to spell it with capital letters four times over. O my people! Condemn it, refrain from it, lead sober lives! And whenever you are tempted to drink, which is the evil that will lead you into every other evil, remember what were almost the last words of the poor man lying here before you, *'It was whiskey did the job!'*"

All this the good priest said and much more. He concluded by denouncing the white men on the reservations who, though forbidden under severe penalties, sold liquor to the Indians. He implored them

to be manly and virtuous enough to resist temptation, saying to such deceivers and hypocrites: "Get thee behind me, Satan!" The people were deeply impressed; quietly and reverently they left the church, and mounting their clumsy wagons in silence, were soon on their way to the mountains, accompanied by the body of Pablo Soula in a special conveyance, driven by Mauricio and Francisco, Veronica sitting beside the coffin.

As Father Gaspara stood on the porch of his house watching the departing *cortège,* a well-dressed man approached him with a friendly smile. It was Jasper Jerrany, the storekeeper on the reservation, well known as a secret purveyor of liquor to the Indians, a man for whom the good priest had a great contempt and aversion.

"That was a fine sermon of yours, Father Gaspara," he began. "I don't know that I ever heard a better. I hap-

pened to be in town and thought I would drop in. Pablo used to be a good boy; pity he turned out a rogue and made such a bad end."

"Yes, thanks to you and your like," rejoined the priest. "I saw you there, Jerrany, and so ended as I did. But Pablo cheated you and the devil; he did *not* make a bad end. On the contrary, he died as a Christian. God grant that you may die as well."

And turning from the porch, Father Gaspara left the discomfited storekeeper standing on the sidewalk.

CHAPTER IX

THE DEVIL-FOX

THE morning after the funeral, while the family were at breakfast, Walter said:

"Papa, do you know how Veronica happened to confess that she stole the handkerchiefs?"

"She did not *happen* to do it at all," answered Mr. Page. "As soon as she began to realize that her silence was likely to injure Dionysio she resolved to do it. Fear of imprisonment restrained her at first, but during the noon recess she went to see Father Gaspara. He told her he did not believe she could be put in prison for telling the truth, that the only persons who would have the right to cause her arrest were Dionysio and Luisa. He also said that in any case she must feel herself obliged to

do it. She was quite reassured then, and went bravely to the task of clearing up that portion of the mystery which she held in her hands."

"And they say the Indians are revengeful and without conscience," exclaimed Walter. "If Veronica had been like that she would have felt glad that the murderer of her husband should be punished."

"She does not seem to regret his death in the least, nor even the manner of his taking off. I think her intellect is defective, although Father Gaspara says she was quite a clever girl while attending school at the Mission. He said the Sisters had never had one who was so clean, and she was a fine cook, too; she used to make special little dishes for him—Indian dishes—such as he liked, whenever he went to stay all night or pass a few days there. She would like to find a good place in town. But he wants her to be in a Catholic family who would look after her."

"But if she drinks?" said Jenny.

"He says she will drop all that now. Do you know of any place, Mother?"

Mrs. Page shook her head. "If it were not that we have Josefa, now—" she began.

"But Josefa is—" Walter blurted out, and then, turning crimson, said no more.

"Josefa is what?" asked Nellie, taking alarm. "Surely you wouldn't want Mama to send our good Josefa away for a person like Veronica, who would be always on her mind."

"I wouldn't," answered Walter bluntly. "I said that because—I can't tell you why I said that. I promised—" he ended awkwardly, and went on with his breakfast, steadfastly keeping his eyes on his plate.

"You're the funniest boy," said Nellie. "I believe you would be glad if Mama were to take in Veronica this very day."

"I would," rejoined Walter. "I think it would be the best thing for her, and

maybe for us. I can't tell you what I mean, though, because I promised."

"There is some great mystery here," said Mr. Page. "Perhaps Josefa would be able to unravel it. She may have been taking Walter into her confidence. And I have had a hint from Francisco."

"Then Mama knows," said Walter.

"No, I promised also."

"Ah!" cried Jenny. "I can guess it. Francisco and Josefa are going to be married."

"Well, that's it," said Walter. "But you can't say I told it."

"How did you know?" inquired his mother, greatly amused.

"Josefa and I had a little fuss the other day," he replied. "It didn't last long; we were good friends again in five minutes, but she thought I thought Francisco wasn't honest, and——"

"Francisco not honest!" cried Nellie in surprise.

"Well, let me finish, won't you? She thought I thought he had hidden the handkerchiefs in the basket—and I found out that way. She got so angry—and cried. Oh, dear—let her tell you herself—I'm not going to have anything to do with it," he concluded, hastily rising from the table. "Excuse me, Mama; I must look over my French—" Walter disappeared just as Josefa entered. Not at all abashed, she admitted that she and Francisco wanted to be married; that he had given her permission to tell of their intention, and that she had meant to do so that day.

"And I had meant to ask you if you would try Veronica," she added. "She was here last evening and would be glad to come and stay without wages till I go. I could teach her your ways, Mrs. Page, and it would be such a help to her to be here."

"It seems to me we might give the poor woman a trial," said Mrs. Page. "I

thought she had gone back to the mountains. Are not her things there?"

"She told Dionysio and his wife to pack them and keep them for her. She has not much, and whatever she needs is here; she intended to stay when she came, and brought her clothes."

"Where is she now?" asked Mr. Page.

"At Father Gaspara's house—staying with the housekeeper and helping her a little. But she could be here at any time."

"Very well; tell her to come and see me," said Mrs. Page. "But I do not know how we can get along without you, Josefa."

"Thank you, Ma'am," replied the Indian girl. "I am very sorry to go, but Mauricio and Francisco are not very comfortable, living that way—and Mauricio wants Francisco to marry before he dies. I think we shall do very well."

"I am sure you will," rejoined Mrs. Page. "I hope we may do as well—with Veronica."

"Are you going to wear a white dress, Josefa?" asked Nellie.

"I have not decided yet," replied Josefa. "I think not, though. It seems to me very foolish for a poor Indian girl to go up to the altar with a long train and a flimsy veil that she can never put on again. I like better some kind of a good suit, with a nice hat."

"You are sensible, Josefa," said Mrs. Page. "And that can be all arranged in due time. We will see that you and Francisco make a good appearance."

"And we will go up to visit you next summer," said Nellie. "Papa, let's camp where we did this year."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Page. "Francisco tells me that you can have a place as chambermaid at the Springs, if you want it."

"Yes, that is what they say," rejoined Josefa. "But Mauricio thinks I will have enough to do in the house. He does not

want me to be a slave, he says. Well, we shall see."

Veronica came and gave so much satisfaction that Josefa was soon enabled to give up most of the work and begin preparations for her marriage, which was to take place from the Pages. A day between Christmas and New Year's was fixed upon for the ceremony. The family gave the young couple a good many pretty and serviceable things. Dionysio and Luisa stood up with them, as groomsman and bridesmaid. The wedding party had breakfast at Mr. Page's expense at a restaurant where the Indians were accustomed to go. They afterward took the ten o'clock train for the mountain station, where they were met by other friends with a wagon and went to their home.

Everybody was surprised at the change in Veronica. She never touched strong liquor, did her work quickly and efficiently, and occupied all her spare time in crochet-

ing and knitting. Nellie was very fond of sitting with her in the evenings, as she had a fund of Indian legends and stories, which she was always willing to relate.

One evening when Father Gaspara had been at the house, Veronica said: "Whenever I see him I think of the picture my mother had of a Father who was a saint, and he looked like him, but he had no beard."

"Where did he live?"

"With the other missionaries, but he went about from place to place, visiting the Indians, after they were sent to the reservations. He put an end to the Devil-Fox."

"The Devil-Fox? What was that, Veronica?"

"Once, when my mother was a little girl, a great ugly fox was for a long time prowling about killing the chickens and the geese, so that no one could keep any poultry. He was *very* big, with black skin and

red eyes that shone like lamps. Many braves went over to capture him with traps and guns, but they could not do it, and they could only see him from afar; he never came near. On a hillside he would often stand in the broad day, but so far that they could not catch him. And once Padre Leo came, and a woman said to him:

" 'Padre, the fox still kills my chickens and those of my neighbors—and we are helpless. There is a woman here—an old woman—you know her—Adina Saulo—she is a medicine woman, and she says that she can banish that fox with her Indian charms. And many people believe her—but they are afraid to do wrong and let her work those charms. No, how shall it be?'

"And the holy Padre said: 'I will go to Adina Saulo.' "

"Adina Saulo!" exclaimed Nellie. "Was she related to Pablo, who killed—" and then she paused.

"His great-grandmother. The Padre

went to her, where she sat in her wigwam, and said: 'Adina, is it true that you can banish the fox with your charms?'

" 'It is true,' she said.

" 'I hear that my people are being tempted by you to do that which is forbidden by our religion. I will call my people.'

"So he gathered them all together and he said to them: 'Here is Adina Saulo, who claims that by charms she can banish the wicked fox that is ravaging your poultry. Give her a chance. I will be back this way in ten days, and then you will tell me.'

"So when the people heard that they might do it, they gave Adina Saulo her way, and in the dead of night she worked her charms. But that same evening came the fox and took many chickens, and so the next and the next. And the people were angry with Adina and called her many names. At the end of ten days came Padre Leo, and he asked:

"'Well, you have all your chickens—yes?' And they told him. And there was Mass, and he preached to them. And he said those charms were heathenish and that it had been proven they were no good. And there was a woman called Salome Malino and she stood up and said:

"'O Padre Leo, they say you are a saint! Will you banish the wicked fox?'

"'I am far from a saint, but God answers the prayer of faith. Where is he?' asked the Padre.

"And they led him to the valley. 'Yonder on that hillside we often see him,' they said. And as they spoke came the fox and faced them—but they were more than a mile away. And then the Padre took his rosary in his hand, and he walked slowly—very slowly—up the hill, and the people watched and they said, 'When the Devil-Fox sees the Padre he will go away.' But he did not, and the Padre came nearer, nearer, always praying on his rosary—and

then he came to the fox and the people saw him stand close, close, to the animal. And it was never known before that a fox would stand still for a man to come to him—and to talk to him. And they saw the fox droop down his head and his tail, and the Padre put his hand upon his body and turn him around, and slowly, slowly, the fox left the hillside like one that was sick and could hardly walk, and they followed him with their eyes till he went into the bushes, and they saw him no more.

"And the Padre came back to the people and he said: 'To-day I think the Lord has had the victory over the devil and that the fox will not again return. Let us kneel and thank God.' And they knelt and gave thanks. And the fox came no more. And Adina Saulo was there, and after that she abandoned her evil charms and was a good woman. And it was time, for she was very old. My mother heard this from her mother—and she, my mother, was a little

child at the time. And that is why she always liked so well the picture of the holy Padre."

"Is your mother still living, Veronica?" asked Nellie.

"Oh, yes; she is still living—my father, too. He works with my brothers on the sheep-ranch of Juan Astres—the rich Basque. You have heard of that sheep-ranch?"

"No, I haven't," said Nellie. "Where is it, Veronica? Do you ever go there?"

"It is on the Baraga grant, close to Starvation Mountain. I have not been since I am married, but I have seen my brother often. I saw him last week, and he says that my father and mother would like to have me come. Perhaps for a week at the sheep-shearing time I may have permission to go. They will be there then, at my brother's house. You would like it, too, Nellie."

"When does it happen?"

"In the spring."

"We can't go then," said Nellie. "I must go to school, you know. But I'm sure Mama will let you go and visit your mother.

"My brother is the captain of the sheep-shearers," said Veronica. "Your father knows him very well; he is a good man. He does not get drunk and he has a good house and a good wife. The house is better than that of many white men. I wish your father and mother would let you go there with me, Nellie."

"What is your brother's name?" asked Nellie.

"He is called Fidelio Yescas," said Veronica. "Your father will know that all I have said is true."

Mr. Page was surprised to hear that Fidelio Yescas, whom he knew very well and respected, was the brother of Veronica. "He has been in the employ of that ranch

for years," he said. "The only strange thing about him is that he is married to a white girl."

"Doesn't that often happen among the Indians?" asked Jenny.

"No; we sometimes hear of a white man marrying an Indian woman, but I have never before seen a good white girl married to an Indian man. She is a remarkably nice-looking woman, and a strict Catholic. I can not understand it. I am sure you would enjoy a visit to Baraga at sheep-shearing time, and Jenny especially would like to see it. When April comes we may be able to take a few days' vacation."

CHAPTER X

THE SHEEP-SHEARING

THE winter was nearly over. The rains had been unusually abundant; the hills and valleys were clothed in living green, which had not yet begun to fade into brown, late showers keeping the streams full and making a carpet of wild flowers for every hillside and meadow.

Golden poppies and purple and white Mariposa lilies were blooming everywhere; wild hyacinths and heliotrope filled the air with perfume, which the fragrance of the yellow violet was already beginning to encroach upon with its own peculiar, delicate aroma.

Wild Shasta daisies with chocolate-colored hearts sprang up beside the mountain roads, and daintiest and most fragile of all, the yellow flowers of the wild mustard

swayed and bent on their slender green stalks with every breath of the passing wind.

Jenny and Nellie had been for a drive and came home laden with wild flowers of every description. There were not enough vases or pitchers in the house to hold them; the girls went into the store-shed and brought out empty lard buckets, which they covered with pleated crêpe paper and placed wherever they could find a vacant corner.

"I never saw anything like it," said Jenny. "I wouldn't have missed this winter in California for a great deal, Aunt Fanny. There can be nothing in the world more delicious and healthful than the smell of that southern wood and sage—though they are entirely different."

"Both are aromatic," said Mrs. Page. "Did you see many bees?"

"We saw hundreds of them dipping into the sage-blossoms."

"This will be a good year for honey. Dionysio told me," rejoined Mrs. Page. "He was here to-day. They are going to leave the ranch where they are. It has been sold."

"Where will they go?" asked Nellie. "I hope he has something else to do."

"Yes, he has. They are going, for the present at least, to the sheep-ranch of which Vèronica's brother is manager. It seems he needs a reliable assistant and has long wanted Dionysio."

"When do they go?" asked Jenny.

"Some time next week."

"And the old people? Will they accompany them?"

"No, they prefer to remain where they are. They are too old to change. They have a son near Rincon, who will take care of them."

Nellie had not forgotten the sheep-shearing. She had frequently reverted to it during the winter, always with regret

that they could not assist at it, as Veronica had often spoken of her proposed visit.

"Oh, dear!" she said. "What a pity they don't shear the sheep in summer! We might go then."

"We may go as it is," said Mr. Page. "They will begin early in April, the week after Easter, when you will have a vacation. I saw Fidelio yesterday. He tells me there is a very good small furnished house there where we could camp for a few days. Margarita can go to her parents, and if you three, with the assistance of Walter and myself in splitting wood and carrying water, think you will be able to do the work, we will go."

"Oh, what fun!" cried Nellie. Walter was equally delighted, though with the dignity of his sixteen years, not quite so demonstrative.

In order not to miss any of the performance, they started on Easter Sunday in the afternoon. A wagon had been sent up the

day previous with provisions, the family, including Veronica, traveling by automobile. As they passed, toward evening, under the shadows of Starvation Mountain, which had advanced and receded all along the precipitous, winding way, Mr. Page announced that they were nearing the end of their journey.

"Why do they call the mountain by that peculiar name?" Walter asked his father.

"Years ago, during the Mexican war," answered Mr. Page, "a party of Americans were surprised there by the enemy, who tried to corral them by cutting them off from the provision supply, but they did not succeed in doing it—though the Americans had nearly collapsed when rescue came. Ever since it has been called Starvation Mountain."

At intervals the party in the automobile would meet groups of Indians with packs and blankets on their shoulders.

"They go to shear the sheep," said Ve-

ronica, who was in the back seat with Nellie. "I know some of them; they are from the Rincon Reservation, where I lived with my husband."

"Are there many sheep?" asked Nellie.

"About three thousand this year, Fidelio has told me. Sometimes there are even more."

"I see a few women among them, Veronica. Are they going to help shear the sheep?"

"Oh, no; they come with their husbands or friends to see friends and relations. There are many girls from the neighborhood who have married away from their own home."

"How did your brother come to be captain of the sheep-shearers, Veronica?"

"Because always he has been such a fine worker and such a good man. There has never been another like him on the ranch. He makes the men work every moment of their time, but he gives them good food and

good pay, and they like him. He is not harsh with them, either; Fidelio could not be rough with any one—he has a nature so mild, Nellie. I think the angriest time I ever saw him was when I married Hernando. He said then—and he shook his fist at us: "Get out of my sight quickly, both of you—or I must kill you!"

"Veronica," said the candid Nellie after a pause, "you are much nicer looking now than you used to be—when we first saw you. You must have been *really* pretty when you were a young girl."

"Yes, it may be so," rejoined Veronica with a sigh.

"Was—was Hernando ever very good looking?"

"No—just the same always."

"Was he—very kind?"

"Before we were married, yes—very well; it was because of the pretty ribbons and clothes he promised to give me that I took him."

"And did he give you many?"

"Very few. Last summer I wanted him to buy me some pretty handkerchiefs, like those of Dionysio, but he would not. So one day when I had taken too much beer I was walking home and I saw those of Dionysio, and I took them. Nellie, I did not know it hardly till I found them in my pocket, for I have never been a thief. Hernando said that he would take them back, as he passed that way so often, and he put them in his pocket."

"Was that the day before he died?"

"Oh, no. A week before he died. I thought they were back—maybe he did not get a good chance, and maybe he wanted to sell them."

"Do you think he would have done that, Veronica?"

"Oh, yes," answered the Indian woman with an odd little laugh. "He would sell his soul for money, if he thought he could live a long, long time."

"But, Veronica, that would have been stealing, and don't you think he would have been afraid to sell those handkerchiefs? They were so different from others. Some one would have known they belonged to Dionysio."

"That is why I think he still kept them in his pocket—not wanting to give them back, and yet afraid to sell them. I have not lived so long with that man not to know him! I could tell you things, Nellie."

All at once Nellie realized that they were not engaged in a very praiseworthy conversation. She felt ashamed for having questioned Veronica so closely, and replied:

"I don't believe it is right for us to be talking about a dead person this way, Veronica. He can't help himself at all now, you know."

Veronica looked at her curiously. "Maybe you are right, Nellie," she said.

"But he was a bad man and I have never shed a single tear for him." After a short pause, she added: "I think I will have a Mass said for him. He will need it."

"Have you had others?"

"Oh, yes; five or six—it is my duty." And then, like her companion, probably thinking that she had transgressed the bounds of charity in speaking as she did of the dead Hernando, Veronica took her rosary from her pocket and began to pass the beads through her fingers, devoutly moving her lips and becoming entirely oblivious of Nellie's presence at her side. She continued praying until they had come to the end of the ride.

They were well pleased with the little home which Fidelio had reserved for them. Veronica found that her parents had come down for the sheep-shearing from the distant corner of the reservation where they resided and decided that she would remain

with the Pages instead of going to spend the holidays with her relatives.

"There is not much work to do here," she said. "I can spend enough time with my mother. And I will tell you, Mrs. Page, that if I am to sleep here at nights I will be sure to come without having tasted anything I should not have tasted. It is hard not to drink when others are drinking. Always at the sheep-shearing are a few men and women who have wine."

"Where do they get it?"

"It is sold to them; it is easy—here it is not an Indian reservation. People may have all they want. Every year Fidelio must send away some before the work is over for drinking. If I should drink here you would send me away, and this first visit to my home would also be my last one; they would not want me again. And then what would become of poor Veronica? Here with you let me stay; I can roll in a blanket and sleep on the floor."

It was not yet dark when supper was over, and the Pages went out for a walk. They met many bands of Indians on the road, some of whom were known to Mr. Page. They passed a neat frame dwelling with a flower garden in front and vegetables at the back. A young woman with very white skin, black hair and brown eyes was sitting on the door-step. Beside her two pretty little children played; they were darker than their mother. In the doorway behind his wife stood Fidelio.

"You will be very busy to-morrow, Fidelio," said Mr. Page.

"Oh, yes," was the reply, "and for days after that, packing the wool. This is my wife, and these are my children, Mr. and Mrs. Page."

"You have reason to be proud of your family," said Mrs. Page, after salutations had been exchanged.

"And I am," rejoined the Indian. "I

am glad to see that Veronica is looking so fine. I hear she is doing well."

"Very well. We like her very much," said Mrs. Page, as they passed on.

"Why did Fidelio marry a white woman, Veronica?" asked Nellie that night when she went to have her customary chat with her friend. This time she was accompanied by Jenny, who wanted to see the sentry-tent, hardly large enough to turn around in, which Fidelio had sent his sister.

"I wonder you did not ask why did a white woman marry Fidelio," answered Veronica, pausing in the plaiting of her long black hair. "I will tell you. Once when Fidelio was—maybe twelve—a Jew came with a scissors-grinding wagon, pushing it before him. He was old and weak; on top of the wagon was tied a little girl. He called her Rachel, and he said she was his granddaughter. It was late and he asked to eat and sleep. In the morning

he was gone, but the little girl remained behind, and she lived with us always."

"Did no one try to find the old man?" asked Jenny.

"No," replied Veronica. "Why try to find a man who will run away from a little child and make him take her again only to leave her behind? For if he does it once, he will do it twice."

"How cruel that was!" said Nellie.

"Yes, it may be—though my mother has always said it was for good. She thought he knew he would soon die, and wished rather to leave little Rachel with people than on the roadside."

"And so she grew up as one of your family?" said Jenny.

"Yes, with the other children. Father Gaspara baptized her; she went for two years to the Mission School, where people took notice of her because she was different from the others, and some ladies wanted to take her—but she would not go,

nor would Father Gaspara allow her." When Fidelio was twenty my father said he would better choose some nice girl from our people and marry. But he said: 'Father, only Rachel will I marry, and if she does not have me, not at all.' And it was Rachel, and there they are."

"And she never has longed for her own race?" said Jenny, thinking aloud.

"Her own race," echoed Veronica. "If you mean the white people, Miss Jenny, she has lived only with Indians—and likes them best. And if it is Jews—why, did they not nail Our Saviour to the cross? Why should she long to be one of them? Oh, no; Rachel is well where she is. And they are happy—what more is wanted?"

"You are right, Veronica," said Jenny. "I imagine Rachel is much better off than if she had followed her grandfather around the country and married another scissors grinder."

"Fidelio would be my choice of the two," said Nellie. "Good-night, Veronica."

"Good-night, and good dreams," answered Veronica, letting down the flap of the tent behind them.

CHAPTER XI

HOME AGAIN

EARLY next morning the tall figure of Fidelio might be seen marshaling his bands of sheep-shearers around the corrals at some distance from the ranch-house. The *ranchero,* who was a non-resident, and quite a wealthy man, always came up for the important event, but always as a looker-on. Everything was left in the hands of the captain; if the proprietor had any suggestions to make they were offered through Fidelio, and the shearers, in turn, if they had complaints, presented them to him or through him, if beyond his jurisdiction, to the proprietor.

The Page family were also on the ground early, wishing to see as much of the proceedings as possible.

"Oh, see the millions of sheep!" cried Nellie, when they came near the corrals.

"Not millions," answered her father. "But there are certainly thousands."

Two men were in one of the corrals, driving out perhaps forty or fifty to the shearing platform not far away. When they had secured as many as they desired, the gate of the yard was again closed.

"Why is that platform covered at the top with green boughs?" asked Nellie.

"To protect the shearers from the sun," replied Walter, who had been obtaining a good deal of information from Fidelio.

"See, there is Dionysio!" cried Nellie, as an Indian advanced from Fidelio's side, and lifting his hand, said something in Spanish, whereupon a number of men with large shears in their hands rushed toward the sheep, grabbed them by one of the hind legs, and dragged them to the platform.

"What noise they make—the sheep," said Nellie.

"Those in the corral do," said Walter. "They know something is going to happen and one imitates the other. But if you'll notice, the sheep that are being sheared do not try to get away, and seldom utter a sound. Fidelio told me to watch that; he says it's the usual thing—though sometimes they bleat a little."

"Watch the shearers well, girls," said Mr. Page. "See how deftly they work."

It was very interesting to follow the movements of the workmen. They began on the breast, manipulating the shears half way round the body of the animal, holding it between their legs, and then turning it on the other side. During all the time the Indians were in a stooping posture, seldom straightening up until they were through with a sheep.

There were thirty or forty men working at a time on each platform, and were finished at nearly the same moment. Fidelio had edged his way round to where the

Pages were standing. He seemed to be watching Dionysio, who moved here and there among the sheep-shearers. Each of the shearers had a bit of sacking or old woolen blanket thrown over his shoulder. As they let the sheep go, they threw these pieces of cloth on the ground, and bundling up the fleece in them, left the platform.

"Where are they going?" asked Walter of Fidelio.

"You see yonder counter, behind the platform, with a man standing on the other side?" answered the Indian.

"Yes," said the boy.

"Well, every man takes his fleece there and gets in exchange a piece of tin, which he puts in his pocket. At the end of the day he gives up his tins, one for every sheep he has sheared, and receives his wages. That makes it easy and just—every man according to the work he has done—some more, some less. There is a

man here who has sheared as many as eighty sheep in a day. But he is out of the race."

"What race?" asked Walter.

"A purse is given every year for the one who shears the most sheep during the time, and another for the man who can shear one the fastest. But the first morning does not count; they must get well warmed to their work. This afternoon you will see."

"How much in the purses?" asked Walter.

"Five silver dollars in each," replied Fidelio.

After watching the shearing for an hour, Mrs. Page said she would go back to the house. The bleating of the sheep in the corrals, the dust, and the crowd had given her a headache.

After she had gone Walter proposed that they go around to the other side, where they were binding up the fleece for market. They passed Fidelio with a large

pair of shears in his hand, and later they saw him wielding them on the body of a fat sheep, while a young Indian boy, evidently new to the trade, was watching his movements.

"He's teaching the boy to shear," said Walter. "How strong he looks, and how easily he holds down that fat fellow. And see how he uses the shears! He could easily win a purse if he tried."

Two or three men were preparing the wool for market. As the shearers handed it in, it was passed over the counter and bound, three or four fleeces together, into a bundle. An immense sack was then held open by two Indians, while a third went inside of it.

"Why does he do that?" asked Nellie.

"He stamps the wool down until he can not stay in it any longer," rejoined Mr. Page. "He has to work his way out, pressing the wool down with his feet all the time. Each sack is required to hold

three hundred pounds, and there are so many sacks to a wagon. As the wagons are filled they go down with their loads from the mountain, and the wool is shipped away, either by steamer or train. Then they return and load up again."

At ten o'clock a horn sounded and the men were allowed fifteen minutes' recess. Punctually at the end of that time they resumed their work, continuing until noon.

The Pages were as tired, they said, as though they had been sheep-shearing. Veronica had dinner prepared, and Walter proposed, as they had now mastered the mysteries of shearing, that they drive over to *La Primavera* ranch, where the cherries, almond, and walnut trees were in bloom. The proposition met with favor; the day was balmy with the fragrance of spring and brilliant with its sunshine. On the way they passed acres and acres of grain, belonging to the ranch they had just left.

And then they came to orchard after orchard of cherries and nuts all in bloom.

"Let's come up here in June, when the cherries are ripe," said Nellie. "I'm sure Jenny likes cherries."

"They're my favorite fruit," replied her cousin. "If we can in any way compass it, Nellie, we must come here in June."

The shades of evening were descending when they returned to the little cottage behind the trees. On the way they passed a number of tents, outside of which the shearers were cooking their evening meal over small fires made of the broken wood that was scattered all about. Men lay on their backs smoking, looking up at the softly clouded sky. Dogs barked; here and there a few women were gossiping. Later, as they sat on the veranda talking, they heard music and singing—weird, sorrowful strains that sounded funereal to the

white people, who did not understand their meaning.

The next day was a repetition of the first, except that there were more shearers and the work went faster.

On the third day the prizes were awarded and the sheep-shearing was over for that year.

They saw Dionysio for a few moments only; he was busy day and night with his work. Luisa was still at Rincon with her parents.

On the fourth morning squads of Indians began to take up their march to their own reservation. Their hearts were light, their pockets heavy with silver. For the ranch Indians it was a holiday.

"Some of them will take home the money to their wives to use for household expenses," said Mr. Page. "And some of them, unfortunately, will go down into the city and leave every cent they've earned in the saloons and gambling halls. But

we can hardly blame them for the vices we ourselves have taught them."

Two more days of delightful drives and quiet, restful hours under the trees, and the Pages turned their faces homeward.

When they arrived Jenny found an important letter awaiting her. She came with it in her hand into the dining-room.

"Ah, people!" she said. "I ought to be glad to be going home, but I am not."

"You don't have to go!" exclaimed Nellie and Walter together.

"Yes, my dears. Mother has written and I shall have to start next week. My sister Minnie is going to be married in May to her college professor, whom we thought she never would decide to take, though he's been asking her for years. They will go for a bridal trip to Europe, and mother will need me."

"We are all so sorry, Jenny," said Mrs. Page. "But you must come back; you

must surely come back—with your mother."

"Perhaps—who knows?" said Jenny, brightening. "Wouldn't it be glorious to live here always! You can't tell how I hate to go, Aunt Fanny, and yet I ought not to complain. I've grown so well and strong."

"Oh, Jenny," murmured Nellie tearfully, coming close to her cousin.

"Yes, I must go, dear," said Jenny, pressing the warm little hand. "And I had been dreaming that delicious fruit was ripening for me in the mountain orchards. But I know you will think of me, children, when you are eating *La Primavera* cherries in June."

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